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Rupturing the Stage: Performing Women in Brian Friel's Theatre

A Dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
Requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

in

Drama and Theatre

by

Heather Lynn Donahoe LaForge

Committee in charge:

Professor Marianne McDonald, Chair
Professor Robert Cancel
Professor Daphne Lei
Professor Emily Roxworthy
Professor Janet Smarr

2008

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Chair

University of California, San Diego

University of California, Irvine

2008

DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my husband, Andrew;

without his editing, support, and love I would not have made it.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Signature Page…………………………………………………………... iii

Dedication……………………………………………………….............iv

Table of Contents………………………………………………………...v

List of Photographs……………………………………………………… vi

Acknowledgements………………………………………………………vii

Vita, Publications, and Fields of Study…………………………………..viii

Abstract…………………………………………………………………..ix

Introduction: "This Erasure was Absolute'": the Traumas of Ireland……... 1

Chapter One: "Free (Wo)man of the City, Sure that Means Nothing":
Rupturing Identity for the Colonized Female in
The Freedom of the City…………………………………………… 39

Chapter Two: "Something is Being Eroded": The Subaltern Speaks in
Translations…………………………………………………….... 69

Chapter Three: "Mature Women, Dancing?": Communal Freedom in
Dancing at Lughnasa……………...105

Chapter Four: "They're Much More Pure, My People": Friel in Context… 140

Conclusion……………………………………………………………. 174

Works Cited………………………………………………………….... 180

Bibliography………………………………………………………….. 186

LIST OF PHOTOGRAPHS

Fig. 1.1: Peace Line in Belfast…………………………………………………... 10

Fig. 1.2: Belfast Mural……………………………………………………………... 11

Fig. 1.3: Sign directing tourists to St. Stephen's Green…………………………. 14

Fig. 1.4: Sign at Trinity College in Dublin……………………………………… 15

Fig. 2.1: Father Daly waving a bloodied handkerchief………………………….. 47

Fig. 2.2: Father Daly administers the Last Rites………………………………… 48

Fig. 3.1: A map of the principal triangulation of Ireland………………………... 79

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VITA

2003	B.A., University of Puget Sound
2003-2007	Teaching Assistant, Department of Theatre and Dance University of California, San Diego
2007	Associate-In, Department of Theatre and Dance University of California, San Diego
2008	Graduate Instructor, Muir Writing Program University of California, San Diego
2008	Ph.D., University of California, San Diego

PUBLICATIONS

LaForge, Heather Donahoe. "Out of the Mold and Into the Event: Atlanta's Out of Hand Theater." *TheatreForum*, Summer/Fall 2007, 50-57.

FIELDS OF STUDY

Major Field: Theatre and Drama

Studies in Irish Theatre
Professor Marianne McDonald, University of California, San Diego

Studies in Post-Colonialism
Professor Daphne Lei, University of California, Irvine
Professor Jody Blanco, University of California, San Diego

Studies in Feminism
Professor Nadine George, University of California, San Diego

Studies in Trauma Theory
Professor Emily Roxworthy, University of California, San Diego

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Rupturing the Stage: Performing Women in Brian Friel's Theatre

by

Heather Lynn Donahoe LaForge

Doctor of Philosophy in Drama and Theatre

University of California, San Diego, 2008
University of California, Irvine, 2008

Professor Marianne McDonald, Chair

This dissertation analyzes contemporary Irish playwright Brian Friel's dramatization of the doubly oppressed Irish female who is victimized not only by the British colonizer, but also by the Irish men who seek compensation for their own colonized status. Friel uses the stage to speak to this question by representing the trauma of the doubly oppressed female and giving voice to this otherwise silenced figure. Despite scholarly attention to Friel, little work has been done to examine the treatment of women in his plays. Through the use of feminist, post-colonial, and trauma theory, I examine Friel's use of a specific theatrical technique, *the moment of rupture*, where his female characters break out of their normal speech patterns to enter into an awareness of their trauma. This dissertation explores how Friel employs this device in *The Freedom of*

the City, *Translations*, and *Dancing at Lughnasa* to steer his audience to and through the moral and political issue of women's disempowerment.

INTRODUCTION

"THIS ERASURE WAS ABSOLUTE"[1]: THE TRAUMAS OF IRELAND

> *[Brian Friel] paints families, love affairs, jealousies, reconciliations. His skill is gently wielded and is closely allied to music. His texts are easily learned because the rhythms are so natural – onomatopoetic – and alliterative. He gives the actor clues. We adore him.*
>
> Rosaleen Linehan
>
> A letter to the author, 13 April 2006

In 1971 Irish playwright Brian Friel broadcast a "self-portrait" for BBC Northern Ireland, in which he discussed his decision to become a writer:

> I began to survey and analyse the mixed holding I had inherited – the personal, traditional, and acquired knowledge that cocooned me: an Irish Catholic teacher with a nationalist background, living in a schizophrenic community. (Corbett 107)

The schizophrenic, split community, of which Friel was a part, provides the background for many of his plays. His scripts give insight into the Irish landscape, less beautiful than the American tourist would be led to believe, by writing about the "gaps between word and deed, between thought and feeling, between action and memory, and between the heart and the head" (Corbett 108). It is in these gaps that Friel locates the voice of his Irish characters. Friel has his characters speak from the gaps in theatrical *moments of rupture*; through these moments he tells the forgotten narratives left behind by years of violence and trauma.

In the late 1960s violence erupted in Northern Ireland as a clash of ideals and allegiance came to a head for the two opposing communities sharing the small country. The roots of the conflict stretch back many centuries through a history passed on from

---

[1] Friel, Brian. *The Faith Healer*, pp. 344.

generation to generation; it is a painful legacy given to Ireland's youth. Ireland has never been considered a nation at peace; its history is wrought with violence, oppression, and occupation, and its citizens have internalized this history as part of their national identity. Catholic in religion since the fifth century, the island endured various occupations leading up to the most recent in the early fifteenth century. These incursions began as early as the sixth century BC with the invasion of the Celts, and continued through the ninth and tenth centuries with Viking raids; the Normans settled soon after, and England and Wales established colonies during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. The region had little rest between invasions, with little time for recovery or the formation of identity outside of the trauma of war and occupation. Today the island is split into two separate nation-states, the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland, and for the past eighty years these countries have had separate histories. One is defined by aggression, the other by rebirth.

Prior to 1922,[2] however, the island was united, and the people of Ireland shared a common and traumatic history. This trauma is locatable in specific historical events—events that had a profound effect on the island and those who call it home. I examine the effect of the traumatic events through the idea of *rupture*. Throughout Ireland's history traumatic events metaphorically ruptured the Irish cultural landscape. As each traumatic event occurred, a breach or a crevasse was created in the Irish identity, separating communities and dividing histories. And, as the metaphorical crevasse formed, a void

[2] The division into two separate countries was long and arduous. A brief explanation of the events between 1922 (when partition occurred) and 1949 (when the Republic of Ireland was officially formed) will be offered later in this chapter as part of a discussion of the split.

opened, which swallowed narratives, silencing the voices of those victims that inhabit the space.

In wrestling with this idea of rupture, this dissertation will draw on literary theorist Cathy Caruth's discussion of trauma and postcolonial theorist Frantz Fanon's depiction of the experience of the Algerian "native" in his book *The Wretched of the Earth*. In explaining Ireland's unique traumatic history, I intend not only to borrow existing elements of these theories but also to build upon this body of work in order to move into a new theoretical explanation of the current trauma of the island. Despite its shared history, the island is now two countries: one (the Republic of Ireland) is considered by the majority of its citizens and in literary circles to be a post-colonial nation; the other (Northern Ireland), is, at least for some of its citizens, still partially colonized, either post- or current. Yet whether Republic or Northern Ireland, this is an island that continues to define itself by colonization.

The trauma experienced by the victims of colonization is unique; it is national, and it is passed on generationally. Unlike trauma discussed by Caruth, the trauma of colonialism is not a singular isolated event; it cannot be defined, nor can it be located. Rather, colonialism is a continued trauma. This continued trauma is one that many of the citizens in Northern Ireland today would argue is still occurring; nearly fifty percent of the population desire the nation to be united with the Republic and free of British rule. As colonialism is a continued trauma, it is, then, a trauma in progress, perpetually changing as it moves to and through generations. The trauma in progress functions in a unique way in relation to Ireland's rupture. As new traumatic events occur, they continue to rupture

the same crevasse, widening the gap formed by the ruptured metaphorical landscape. And as the crevasse grows, more narratives are lost as voices are silenced.

Five events that continue to define the identity of the nation through rupture are: the colonization of the island by King Henry VIII in the 16th century, the English Ordnance Survey in the early 19th century, the Potato Famine in 1845 – 1846, the beginning of the split of the island into the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland in 1922, and Bloody Sunday[3] during the height of the Northern Irish Troubles in 1972.[4] Interestingly, each successive trauma becomes focused on a smaller, more isolated community. The first traumatic event affected the Irish as a large community; as history progressed, the subsequent events narrowed to Northern Ireland, and then to the Catholic community within Northern Ireland itself. Even with this narrowing scope, the events arise out of the same frustration; they all spew from a struggle for a freedom of identity for the Irish Catholics.

I deliberately use the term "identity" in order to encompass issues of both gender and national allegiance, ideas that are inextricably linked. As Fanon articulates, the colonizer constantly tries to negate colonized identity. "The settler makes history and is conscious of making it" (Fanon 51). Because his masculine identity is threatened, the native man, instead of rising up against his colonizer, takes his aggression out on the native woman, oppressing her until she ultimately lives her life suffering under a dual colonization. Her identity has been stripped away by two colonizations: that by the

---

[3] During the War of Independence in 1920 Ireland experienced another Bloody Sunday when, in retaliation for an IRA massacre of 14 men in hotels around Dublin, British Black and Tans opened fire at a crowd during a gaelic football match at Croke Park killing 12. For the rest of this dissertation, however, when I discuss Bloody Sunday. I will be referring to the 1972 event.

[4] These events are discussed in more detail in the next section of this chapter.

nation, and that by men. The female is silenced in her position as the doubly colonized victim, and *this* is her trauma—her silenced voice and inability to articulate her identity. Although first written about the colonization of Algeria, which is undoubtedly a separate experience with its own cultural specificities, Fanon's discussion of the ramifications of colonization can be applied to Ireland and the Irish experience.

Friel has, since he began writing in the late 1960s, used his art to respond to Ireland's traumatic past. Friel employs the theatre space to intervene in the trauma of his nation's history, the history that has defined him, by utilizing the traumatic events themselves as the setting of his plays. Theatre scholars have previously discussed Friel's use of Irish events as backdrops for his narrations. This dissertation, however, explores how Friel's plays navigate two traumas—national and gendered—through a theatrical device I refer to as the *moment of rupture*. Although executed differently in each play, the moment of rupture always occurs during a moment of heightened theatricality where the characters break out of their normal speech patterns to enter into an awareness of their trauma. While calling to mind the ruptured cultural landscape, Friel utilizes the power of the theatrical rupture as these characters speak from the crevasse, their silenced voices recovered. Through the moment of rupture the characters begin to move through the trauma, allowing a process of healing to start for both character and audience.

In Friel's work this dramatic convention responds to the battle of identity that has defined the colonial and gender wars in Ireland over the past centuries. Friel's plays use the backdrop of the national historical traumatic events in order to wrestle with these questions of identity—questions at the very core of colonization. Colonizers attempt to gain control over the colonized victims by attacking their identity, negating it and

constructing it. As such, the traumatic events that stand out in Ireland's history, the events that Friel writes into his dramas, are ultimately a collision between colonizer and colonized in the fight for identity.

History Repeats Itself:
Trauma in Ireland

In order to explore Friel's response to Ireland's trauma in the following chapters of this dissertation, it is necessary to first briefly discuss some of the traumatic events themselves.

King Henry VIII's Invasion

In the 16th century, fearing a Catholic invasion of England, Protestant King Henry VIII violently took possession of Ireland, abolishing monasteries, conquering land for his own British settlers, and establishing the Protestant church in the Catholic nation of Ireland.

> The principal motive which inspired the Irish undertakings of the sovereigns was self-protection. … Irish recalcitrancy was, from their point of view, a danger which increased as the sixteenth century progressed and as they became more deeply involved in the European struggle for power and in the religious warfare of the age. (Moody and Martin 174)

This invasion, stretching from King Henry VIII in 1535 to Commander Oliver Cromwell in 1649, marked the entrance for a British occupation that is still in effect in the North. For the native Irish the invasion was the first of a new series of ruptures in their collective lives and a start to a silencing of their narratives.

Beginning in the 1530s Irish were forced out of their homes as the British became the ruling class, authority on religion, and leaders in the newly established Protestant government. A newly passed act gave Henry VIII power over the country and its people,

naming him “the only supreme head on earth of the whole church of Ireland.” This proclamation was “justified by the statement that ‘this land of Ireland is depending and belonging justly and rightfully to the imperial crown of England’” (Moody and Martin 180). In 1541 King Henry VIII was accorded the King of Ireland. As more British emigrated to the new, beautiful and inexpensive colony, tension grew between the two communities. Joseph Ruane and Jennifer Todd, authors of *The Dynamics of Conflict in Northern Ireland: Power, conflict, and emancipation*, elaborate on the long-term effect of this traumatic act: “The [twentieth-century] conflict in Northern Ireland has its roots in developments in Europe, Britain and Ireland during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries which set Irish society and Irish-British relations in a conflictual mould” (16). The aggression of the first invasion by the British has, as Ruane and Todd articulate, left deep-rooted tension between the two communities that is still present. In a powerful interview in 1993 an Irish priest tried to explain these feelings to an English author:

> They’re the feelings that are rooted in our past history…: the history of both our countries, yours and mine. Because we, you see, we’ve never done anything to you like you’ve done to us. We’ve never exploited you, or oppressed you…. Feelings of anger, feelings of resentment: they’re deeply inbred in the Irish people towards you, much much more than your people understand. (Parker 59)

As evidenced by this priest’s words, the experience of the original act of colonization left an indelible imprint on the Irish community.

Caruth’s definition of trauma casts light on this experience. She articulates “in its most general definition, trauma describes an overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events in which the response to the event occurs in the often delayed, uncontrolled repetitive appearance of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena” (11).

Trauma, therefore, is not the event itself, but rather the way the event defines the individual afterwards, the way the event imposes on the victim's life. Although Caruth's work examines the experience of trauma for an individual, the experience can be translated to a national trauma, particularly for countries which, like Ireland, have a history of political oppression.

This national trauma left by Henry VIII's invasion is evident in the fact that current citizens of Northern Ireland define themselves using terminology that arose out of this original sixteenth-century event. The titles individuals use in Northern Ireland to define themselves, and more specifically, to align themselves with a particular side of the conflict, have been used for nearly five centuries. By using the typically religious terminology to describe political alignment (Catholics want Northern Ireland to be part of the Irish Republic, and Protestants want to remain loyal to the British crown),[5] the original colonization is repeated daily for the citizens of Ireland. The trauma of the original colonization is also repeated as in the choice of the terms themselves, as the terms Catholic and Protestant stem from the original reasoning for the act of colonization—that is, King Henry VIII's fear of Catholic invasion by the Irish citizens. In the end, the terms separate individuals from one another as the battle over identity continues, and the sixteenth century "conflictual mould" endures.

King Henry VIII's colonization is not just as a memory for the Irish, but is part of their present lives. Today the descendants of those original Protestant settlers still live in Ireland—their presence a constant reminder of Henry VIII's violent overtaking. The

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[5] It is important to understand that these titles have little to do with religious affiliation. Indeed there are some Protestants who desire a free united Ireland and vice versa. In addition, within this paper I am articulating the majority opinion of the various communities and, it should be understood, that, as in all countries, not every citizen feels the same way.

colonization is a national trauma for Ireland—a trauma that can be transmitted generationally so that victims who never experienced the original incident can indeed suffer the traumatic experience, and experience the ongoing effects of the violence that occurred. Psychologists Nagata and Cheng discuss this phenomenon in their theory of race-related trauma, stating that "traumas are… situated within historical contexts across generations" (267). Ireland's trauma, the act of this original colonization of King Henry VIII is being discussed in family homes today as evidenced by the sentiment in some communities in Northern Ireland.

I experienced the effects of this generational transmission on a trip to Belfast in the summer of 2002. The divided city is, in essence, a patchwork quilt of communities, the seams of which are concrete "peace lines" that are intended to keep the Protestants and Catholics separate to maintain the peace but which, in reality, serve only to "make sure your target is precise" as my cab driver, Ken, told me. The peace lines are covered in graffiti, all of which are political. One poignant phrase that stands out as a reminder of the trauma that the communities have endured simply reads, "Fuck Peace."

Fig. 1.1 Peace Line in Belfast, June 2002.

Photo by Andrew D. LaForge

The streets in Belfast are covered with murals that speak of political anger and rubber bullets. These bullets, used by police to break up riots, are supposed to injure, but often kill because they are fired at close range. In one Protestant neighborhood a mural is painted on the face of a large building. Two men wear masks and hold guns, and the words beside them read, “The Catholic Church is more than a religion, it is a political power. I believe I must crush the Catholic Church for a peaceful Ireland.” As I drove down the street I realized I was surrounded by anger left by centuries of violence and division.

Fig. 1.2 Belfast mural in a Protestant neighborhood, June 2002.

Photo by Andrew D. LaForge

The summer of 2002 marked the United Kingdom's celebration of Queen Elizabeth II's 50 years in reign, her Golden Jubilee. While I was in Belfast, the Catholic community held riots, vocalizing their opposition to the event and to the Queen that rules the Northern Irish country. I remember seeing a young boy, around age eight, riding a motorbike in a Catholic area of Belfast. He zoomed passed us, fist in the air, a mural of hatred painted on the wall behind him, and screamed something unintelligible and angry. Ken looked back at me and said matter-of-factly, "He's going to be in the IRA someday." The trauma of the first act of colonization still resonates in the messages on the peace lines and in the young children who, instead of playing basketball in the street, are already shouting with anger about their oppressive lives.

English Ordnance Survey

The second event that stands out in Irish history as particularly traumatic is the mapping of Ireland. In the early nineteenth century, the English Ordnance Survey, or mapping as it is commonly called, began as an effort to Anglicize the town names and

geographical features of the island. Ordered by the British government and carried out by the British military, mapping was, at its core, a tool to get rid of Irish language and culture, completely colonizing the island. In this attack on the Irish identity, the Irish language was rendered useless and declared unfit for government purposes.

> The basis of that exercise was the renaming of places to make them more comprehensible to English-speakers, a process of apparently pragmatic translation that had profound effects: hastening the irrelevance of Gaelic[6] as a language and therefore the end of Gaelic culture. (Coult 84)

As voices were silenced and language disappeared the metaphorical crevasse created by this traumatic event swallowed Irish narratives.

Even though the trauma of renaming did not occur until the nineteenth century, the change was gradual, as the Irish language had been disappearing for over one hundred years. Prior to mapping, the Irish language was still spoken by the native Irish, but with so many English moving into Ireland and taking over the land, "by 1700 [the Irish language] had become the speech of the poor and underprivileged" (Power and Duffey 64). With English as the language of those in power in Ireland, the British had an easy justification for changing the map to the colonizing language. During the survey, suddenly town names were changed, English became the official language of the country, and the Irish language was banned from schools and churches. In a final oppressive move, the language of the colonized native was no longer being recognized by the government. This change meant an institutionalized split, and the Irish endured a split identity as many spoke the Irish language at home but were forced to speak English at school or in town.

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[6] Gaelic was the word once used to describe the Irish language. Today it is considered to be insulting to use the word "Gaelic" in lieu of "the Irish language".

For the British, the removal of the Irish language was an attempt to remove Irish history as well, as familial stories died with the Irish language. Fanon reminds us that attack on history and historical narrative is a conscious choice on the part of the colonizer, a conscious decision to remake history (51), a phenomenon that Friel himself makes no small gesture to in the title and action of his play *Making History*. As the settler or colonizer removed the Irish language, he was attempting to rewrite the history of the Irish native as well, in an effort to erase the separate Irish identity.

The trauma of the English Ordnance Survey was this British attempt at an erasure of Irish identity. Language was removed from the Irish, and their country renamed. As this trauma occurred, those erased narratives, stories, songs, and words not easily translated to English were lost into the widening crevasse created by the rupture of trauma. Today in the Republic, the trauma of that institutionalized split is repeated in the daily lives of the citizens, becoming part of their identity. In the late 20th and early 21st centuries in the Republic of Ireland there has been a push to reincorporate the Irish language into the Irish culture in an attempt to regain the identity that was taken from them during the English Ordnance Survey. Despite the fact that English is the national language of Ireland, today the Irish language is taught in most school, and, in the Republic, some schools instruct all lessons in the Irish language. As Irish children learn the native language, they reclaim their heritage and history and reassert the identity that was taken from their ancestors during the mapping.

It is unlikely that Ireland will ever return to having Irish as the national language. Some citizens in the Republic use their freedom to regain their heritage—learning their former language, but only a handful of the nation can converse in the Irish tongue. The

reasons for choosing to learn the language vary. For some it is an active political choice, as evidenced in the Irish Republican Army's (IRA) requirement that their members be able to speak the Irish language.[7] Others simply desire to know the language of their ancestors. Despite the motivating political and social decisions behind the reemergence of the Irish language, the trauma of mapping is repeated daily: road signs read in both English and the Irish language, as do place names on buses and maps.

Fig. 1.3 Sign directing tourists to St. Stephen's Green written in both Irish and English, October 2006.

Photo by Andrew D. LaForge

[7] For the IRA the requirement is both symbolic and helpful as they are able to converse in prison without the British guards understanding them, an act that is present in Friel's play *Translations*.

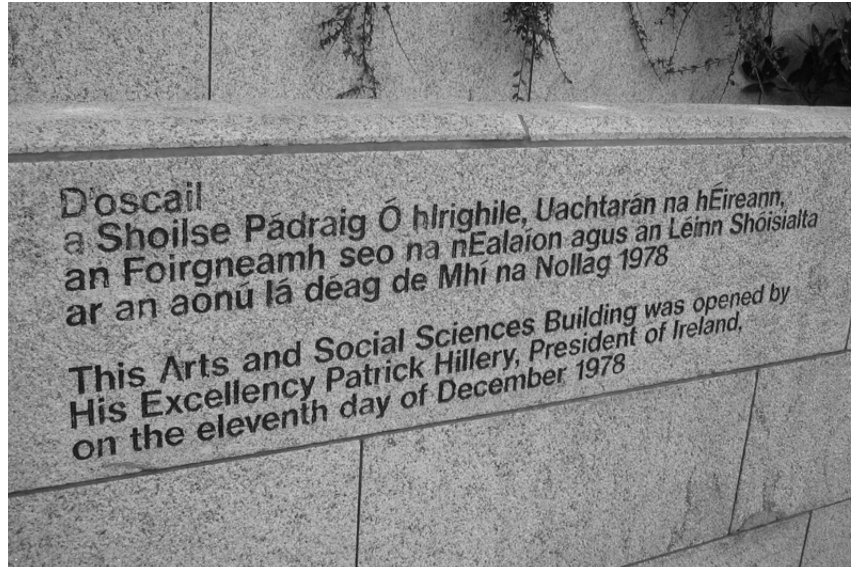

Fig. 1.4 Sign at Trinity College in Dublin written in both Irish and English, October 2006.

Photo by Andrew D. LaForge

The dual languages present on the signs are evidence of the split identity of Ireland. The signs suggest a schizophrenic culture—one whose history is both English and Irish. The signs point also to the dual/dueling nature of the languages. While most citizens read the English language on the signs, the Irish words demand attention—a sign of the conflict that occurred in the late 19th century. Caruth explains that "the story of trauma… as the narrative of a belated experience, far from telling of an escape from reality—the escape from a death, or from its referential force—rather attests to its endless impact on life" (Caruth 7). In Ireland, the trauma of mapping affirms this definition of trauma. The English Ordnance Survey impacts the lives of today's Irish citizens in the very language they speak, a trait of the trauma in progress. The double language on these signs reiterates the split identity of the Irish, who, in their day-to-day lives, receive reminders of their lost history.

The Potato Famine

In the 1840s Ireland suffered from one of the largest catastrophes that Europe has ever encountered. In the early 1800s the potato had become the diet of the Irish people, particularly those in the lower social classes. Because of its health benefits and the ease with which it grew in the Irish countryside, the potato was the preferred staple in the Irish diet. In 1841 approximately two-thirds of the Irish population were dependent on the potato for their livelihood and their lives. But the potato is susceptible to disease and failure, and even in the early 1840s tension mounted as the people became aware of the country's reliance on the crop. "If anything were to happen to the potato harvest disaster would occur on a scale which Ireland would be unable to control and for which the British government was unprepared" (Moody and Martin 268). In 1845, the first disease to affect the potato was reported in the south of England and although it had only a small effect on Ireland's crop, the government caught its first glimpse of the terrifying reality that was about to hit Ireland. In 1846, there was a second failure for the crop in Ireland, "and this time it was complete" (Moody and Martin 269). Because the previous year's failure had been slight, the government decided that if failure hit again there would be no governmental relief leaving food supply up to individuals. But the government did not anticipate what would follow—the potato blight continued for two more years, and by the time it had run its course, from 1845 – 1850 one million people died and another 1.2 million emigrated.

The effect of the famine was long lasting. In his article, "Famine Echoes," Luke Dodd recounts the devastation of the famine while examining the residual effects on the 150th anniversary of the Potato Blight. "The famine was a black hole into which a quarter

of the Irish population disappeared, and the island's continuing depopulation through emigration has been a dominant feature of Irish society since then" (100). The image of Dodd's black hole calls to mind the metaphorical crevasse, which widened ever more with the trauma of the Famine. Dodd articulates the cultural death that occurred when the Potato Famine claimed the lives of so many Irish.

> The 1840s Irish [famine] devastated the most vulnerable, namely, the landless cottiers at the bottom of the social scale. Since this class was predominately illiterate and Irish-speaking, Irish culture and the Irish language took a hammering from which they have never recovered. (100-101)

Dodd's description of the loss of Irish culture is reminiscent of the devastation to the Irish language that occurred with the English Ordnance Survey. After the English Ordnance Survey occurred, the Famine essentially killed the hope of a complete recovery of the Irish language. With 2.2 million out of a population of 8.5 million either dead or gone, the country lost so much of its population in a short five years. And, as noted, the Famine began a trend for emigration that only now, in a post-2000 decade, is beginning to reverse. The Famine has impacted the lives of the Irish for generations, and the trauma of the event is still being felt. With the emergence of the Celtic Tiger[8] in 2000 bringing in immigrants from all over the world, the Irish are only now beginning to reverse the effects of the emigration that occurred in the 1840s. But the loss of Irish lives and Irish culture is impossible to regain; the Famine's impact on Ireland was devastating. Dodd notes that, "the Famine represents one of the key, determining events in the relationship between Ireland and England, a powerful, all-encompassing metaphor for loss, death, and

[8] The phrase "Celtic Tiger" refers to Ireland's economic boom in the 1990s and early 2000s which has transformed Ireland into one of the wealthiest countries in the European Union.

victimization" (98). As the country moved out of the Famine in the 1850s, a rumble began among the Irish citizens who felt abandoned by the government that had been forced upon then, that eventually lead to the removal of England in the early 1900s.

1922 Split

In 1922 the island underwent another transition when it divided into two countries: the lower portion of the island, which today is the independent Republic of Ireland; and Northern Ireland, or Ulster, which consists of six counties and today remains part of the United Kingdom. The split was created in the Home Rule Bill (1920), which called for separate Parliaments for the north and south. The treaty gave political separation for the South from Great Britain, but its citizens still had to pledge allegiance to the British throne. Although it eventually led to a free Irish republic, the treaty was not welcomed by all Irish citizens; originally it divided the community and separated two leaders who had been fighting alongside one another for a free Ireland. Michael Collins, originally a violent revolutionary, supported the treaty that he had helped create, believing it to be a stepping stone towards freedom, while Eamon de Valera found the treaty to be a further colonizing act by the British government. The years between 1922 and 1949 when the Republic of Ireland was formed were wrought with struggle and chaos as citizens in the south tried desperately to discover their identity. While the creation of a free Republic took several decades, for the purposes of this discussion, I use 1922 as the defining traumatic year as it was then that the island officially separated into two entities.

The separation was a victory for those citizens living in the south—it meant eventual freedom from their oppressors and once again living in a free Ireland. For those

Northern Irish citizens who wished to be part of the Republic, however, this rupture again widened the gap and brought further isolation. The Catholics in the North felt abandoned by their compatriots in the South who, although discouraged by the loss of what they believed to be part of Ireland, turned their attention to creating and developing their own free state.

The new country of Northern Ireland was immediately divided into two communities in opposition over whether Northern Ireland should be part of the Republic, or whether it should remain part of Great Britain. The partitioning of the island forced the Northern Irish individual to define him/herself as either Protestant or Catholic, either Unionist or Nationalist. Tony Parker, author of *May the Lord in His Mercy Be Kind to Belfast*, explains how integral these defining elements are to everyday life in Northern Ireland. “The first thing you need to know about someone as soon as you meet them – and they equally need to know about you – is whether each or both of you is Protestant or Catholic. To be ‘neither’ is not sufficient…. What is your *origin?*” (3). It is in these titles that the Northern Irish citizens define themselves, choosing one side of the debate. As they do so, they relive not only the trauma of the original act of colonization, but particularly for the Catholics, the trauma of the split in 1922. The trauma of the split is also repeated for the Northern Catholic community in everyday tasks, such as paying with the British pound versus the Irish note, or now the Euro. The two bordering countries celebrate different holidays; the citizens pay taxes to different governments and vote in different elections. For nearly half of the community living in Northern Ireland, the trauma of 1922 is constantly repeated.

From 1920, when the Home Rule Bill was signed, to the actual split in 1922, Ulster experienced a violence that had not occurred in many years. The IRA, which is "sometimes called 'the terrorist wing'" (Parker 16), and its splinter groups are the most violent and vocal Catholic Republican paramilitary organizations in Northern Ireland. Between the years between 1920 and 1922 the IRA performed raids along the border between the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland, during which the city of Belfast was specifically targeted. During those two years over four hundred people were killed, two-thirds from the Catholic community by either British paratroopers or militant Protestant organizations equivalent to the IRA. David McKittrick and David McVea, authors of *Making Sense of the Troubles*, write, "The communal violence in Belfast, which was on a scale and ferocity not equaled until 1969, left a deep and bitter imprint on many in both communities" (4). The split, and the violence that ensued, proved to be an inciting incident for another traumatic experience in the Northern Catholic community. Over the next forty years, as the Northern Irish government was developing, linked to but independent from England, the violence of the split repeated itself in the minds of the Catholics.

The Troubles

The trauma of the 1922 split still wounds the Catholic community of Northern Ireland who view themselves as victims of the event. The pain derived from the experience, perpetuated through the continuing colonization in the North, created new violence in Northern Ireland and eventually led to a new traumatic event: the Northern Irish Troubles. As the trauma was passed on to younger generations, anger grew more deep-rooted, causing violence to erupt across Northern Ireland. The emotional wounds

that exist from this anger can be explained with Nagata and Cheng's race-related theory. The authors state that, "repeated exposure to overt or covert…discrimination is a lifelong and cumulative experience that can lead to more interpersonal and psychological difficulties than trauma resulting from natural or accidental cause" (266). For the Irish Catholics, these psychological difficulties led to a frustration that divided them from their Protestant neighbors. This frustration eventually turned to violence. The riots that marked the birth of the Northern Irish Troubles in 1968 echoed the violence of the 1920s. "The Catholic civil rights movement would take to the streets in 1968 with complaints which related directly to the arrangements of the 1920s" (McKittrick and McVea 7).

The official years of the Northern Irish Troubles span from 1969 to 1998.[9] Defined by violence and instability in the North, this era included multiple traumatic events for both Catholics and Protestants alike. The escalation of violence hardly seems surprising due to the island's long history of chaos and oppression. For Northern Ireland the question was not if violence would ensue, but when. Fanon writes about the experience of the Algerian "native" in his book *The Wretched of the Earth,* but his formulations of the experience of colonized oppression have been applied to other colonial settings. Here his discussion of violence as a mobilizing factor for the native helps to articulate the experience of the beginnings of the Troubles in Northern Ireland.

> But it so happens that for the colonized people this violence, because it constitutes their only work, invests their characters with positive and creative qualities. The practice of violence binds them together as a whole, since each individual forms a violent link in the great chain, a part of the great organism of violence which has surged upward in reaction to the settler's violence in the beginning. The groups recognize each other and

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[9] 1998 marks the date of the Good Friday Agreement, in which a permanent cease-fire was declared by political leaders from both sides of the conflict along with President Bill Clinton. However, some argue that the Troubles are still ongoing, as occasional militia violence still erupts.

> the future nation is already indivisible. The armed struggle mobilizes the people; that is to say, it throws them in one way and in one direction. (93)

In 1968 the Catholic citizens in Northern Ireland moved together in one direction to fight for two goals: equality within their country and freedom from the colonial oppressor. For years the Irish had futilely attempted to fight back politically and culturally against their oppressors. With options running out violence seemed to be the only tactic left; the Catholic community joined together in violence in an attempt to regain their freedom from the dominant Protestant community.

Over the next three decades approximately 3,600 people would lose their lives (over 2,000 of whom were civilians) in rioting, bombing, and murder. For many Irish Catholics violence became what Fanon would call “a cleansing force” because such action “frees the native from his inferiority complex and from his despair and inaction; it makes him fearless and restores his self-respect” (94). While the Troubles as a whole were certainly traumatic for the Northern Irish community, specific events within the Troubles stand out as particularly traumatizing—Bloody Sunday being one. I choose to focus on this event because of its significance for the Catholic community, its international recognition, and finally because of its timing during the most violent year of the Troubles.

1972 Bloody Sunday

Bloody Sunday occurred on 30 January of 1972, in a year that would become the bloodiest of the Troubles—a year that resulted in 497 deaths. Bloody Sunday, as it has now been named, began when a Catholic coalition, the Northern Irish Civil Rights Association (NICRA), planned a peaceful protest. The march was led by Northern Irish

Member of Parliament Ivan Cooper,[10] in Londonderry/Derry.[11] The march was against internment, a law allowing the British government to arrest Irish citizens and hold them in jail without trial. That day, January 30th, the city was barricaded at specific targeted points by British paratroopers, and the British government lined the streets with its army in fear of a riot breaking loose. The march was scheduled to end at the Guildhall, which was "the sacred symbol of oppressive rule" (Rushe, "Dublin: Ferment Has Outlet on Stage" par. 4) because one, it housed the Mayor's office and two, its was named in honor of the London Guilds. Instead, the paratroopers put up a blockade to prevent the Catholic marchers from finishing there. Cooper tried, with the help of several men and women, to reroute the marchers. Despite their attempt, a small group of marchers, mostly young men, split off and forced their way through the blockade, determined to stand on the steps of the Guildhall in protest. The facts of what followed are unclear; the memory of the marchers tells one story, and the official documents of the government tell another. What is certain is that fourteen[12] Catholic men died when the paratroopers opened fire on the marchers. Eight of the men were under the age of twenty-one. The IRA denied any involvement in the march, and although soldiers claimed they were fired upon first, "no soldiers were either killed or injured by gunfire or nailbombs, and no weapons were recovered by the army" (McKittrick and McVea 76-77). This traumatic event once again widened the gaping crevasse for Irish Catholics, silencing the narratives of the victims who would never be able to tell their story. But the trauma of this event was not just

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[10] Cooper is a Protestant, but he believes in equality. He is highly respected among the Catholic community for speaking out politically on their behalf.

[11] At the time of the march, the city was called Londonderry. It has, however, been officially changed to Derry. For the duration of this dissertation, I will refer to the city by its current name "Derry."

[12] Thirteen men died in the streets, one passed away later from wounds.

because of the violence of the day, but because of the inquiry and its conclusion that followed.

Despite the violent deaths of those fourteen men killed, a troubling conundrum arose for those marchers who walked away from the protest unharmed. Caruth wrestles with what she deems this “urgent and unsettling question”: “*What does it mean to survive?*”(60). For the survivors of Bloody Sunday this question proved to be at the core of their traumatic experience. Their survival, and the trauma linked to it, relied heavily upon the British government and its inquiry into the event. Beginning on 14 February 1972, Lord Chief Justice, Lord Widgery, conducted a full scale investigation into the events of Bloody Sunday, a Tribunal which the colonial government claimed “was not concerned with making moral judgments; its task was to try and form an objective view of the events and the sequence in which they occurred, so that those who were concerned to form judgments would have a firm basis on which to reach their conclusion” (Widgery 4). Upon the completion of the report on 10 April 1972 Lord Widgery came to a conclusion that relieved the British army of any responsibility, leaving the Catholic community without, in their opinion, justice. He concluded that the deaths were essentially “inevitable” (97) because the march happened despite the ban. And, as a final insult to the Catholic community, Lord Widgery released the soldiers from any responsibility, claiming that “There is no reason to suppose that the soldiers would have opened fire if they had not been fired upon first” (99).

Both the event itself and the inquiry produced trauma for the Catholic community. The Widgery Report left the Catholic community of Derry and of Northern Ireland as a whole feeling silenced and without justice. The event left a gaping wound that has yet to

be healed. The Irish community has never been able to move through and beyond Bloody Sunday. The book *Hidden Truths: Bloody Sunday 1972* relates a memory of that day.

> It is in this sense that life experiences seem to be lodged in the body, or even the walls of homes, where they are passed on to the next generation like the familiar mannerisms of loved ones. … In the wake of a more public trauma such as Bloody Sunday, restless memories drift through the streets like the smell of cordite, something almost inhaled with one's upbringing. (Ziff 102)

In an interview in 2003, Cooper said "Never in my wildest imagination did I believe that the paras [sic] were going to act as they did" (*"Bloody Sunday": Ivan Cooper Remembers*). For Cooper, and undoubtedly for the Catholic protestors that day, the trauma of Bloody Sunday lay in the surprise at the violence that occurred. Caruth articulates this dilemma of trauma, explaining that it

> …is not simply, that is, the literal threatening of bodily life, but the fact that the threat is recognized as such by the mind *one moment too late.* The shock of the mind's relation to the threat of death is thus not the direct experience of the threat, but precisely the *missing* of this experience, the fact that, not being experienced *in time*, it has not yet been fully known. (62 her emphasis)

The victim of trauma misses the event, and his or her very existence afterwards is defined by this crisis of missing. It is not the violence of the event itself that haunts the victim but rather that the violence has not yet been, as Caruth articulates, fully known; thus, the mind repeats the event in an attempt to grasp it. As evidenced in interviews, books, and articles centered on Bloody Sunday, those that witnessed it, or were impacted by it, *missed* the event because of their shock at the violence, and therefore they continue to relive it.

"Bloody Sunday is a story the Irish can't forget and it's a story the British don't want to remember" (Sheridan). Despite the pardon granted to the British army by the

Widgery Report, the media coverage of the event itself paints a gruesome portrait of the events of that day. The video coverage and the famous photograph of a priest waving a white handkerchief in front of men carrying out a dead body have left the British army in a rather compromised light. It is important to remember that the British survived the event as well, truamatized in a different way. For many British civilians in England, Bloody Sunday has become a black mark on their identity. The day has gone down in history as a day of massacre caused in the name of the British government. One of the British soliders from the march classified only by a letter to protect his anonymity has since expressed his horror and shock at the day's events.[13] Both sides are still seeking a truth, and this continued search for truth is an effect of trauma itself; trauma is "always the story of a wound that cries out, that addresses us in the attempt to tell us of a reality or truth that is not otherwise available. The truth, in its delayed appearance and its belated address, cannot be linked only to what is known, but also to what remains unknown in our very actions and our language" (Caruth 4). For the Catholic survivors of Bloody Sunday, this element is particularly complicated; they had hoped that the inquiry would be able to express the truth of the event, and yet official language from the mouths of authority failed to do so. For the families of the fourteen dead, the Widgery Report promised to proclaim the truth of Bloody Sunday, a truth that was otherwise unavailable to them because of the chaos of that day. Instead, the trauma of Bloody Sunday was enhanced for these families because the biased report delivered by Lord Widgery claimed

[13] In a docudrama entitled, *Bloody Sunday*, filmmaker Paul Greengrass represents this soldier and the sentiments of much of the British community with a young paratrooper, who throughout the film continually questions what is happening.

false information as truth.[14] The history books record the Widgery Report as the truth of that date, claiming his account of the story as fact for the event of 30 January 1972. But for the Irish, the events of Bloody Sunday still largely remain unknown.

A Vicious Cycle:
Trauma in Ireland

These five events, the colonization by Henry VIII, the English Ordnance Survey, the 1922 split, the potato famine, and the 1972 Bloody Sunday, stand as five markers in the history of a nation defined by trauma. Unlike victims who endure one or at most two traumas in their lives, Ireland's citizens have endured multiple traumas, and the events continue to build on one another. Nagata and Cheng's theory explains the phenomenon: "race-related traumatic events are actually a constellation of multiple traumas that may vary depending on individual circumstance" (267). The psychological damage associated with a constellation of several traumas is further explained in Geraldine Moane's article "Colonialism and the Celtic Tiger: Legacies of History and the Quest for Vision;" she names the phenomenon of trauma being passed on to younger generations, *transgenerational transmission of trauma*. Moane writes, "The concept of transgenerational transmission of trauma can help to understand how psychological patterns can be transmitted across generations" (115). Moane articulates that for Ireland, transgenerational trauma is given an additional feature, retraumatization, when younger generations take on the trauma of their parents and, in addition, receive their own trauma that strengthens the emotional toll of this infectious disease.

[14] Until the new Inquiry of Bloody Sundy, the Saville Report, is published, the Widgery Report remains the British Governments official description as to the events of that day. However, based on eyewitness accounts and forensic evidence, the common belief is that the Widgery Reports are biased and inaccurate (Ziff 104). It is this assumption that led to a new investigation under the command of Lord Saville.

> Retraumatisation plays an important role in transgenerational transmission of trauma. It is intuitively obvious, and has been supported by research, that recovery is more difficult where there is further trauma, and that retraumatisation in a context where recovery is incomplete would be experienced as more traumatic, bringing to the surface again patterns of guilt, anger, shame and grief that are among the reactions to trauma. (Moane 116)

The Irish trauma, as previously explained, is heavily dependent on the circumstances of colonization and the collective struggle to regain a lost national identity. This struggle for the Irish is similar to what Fanon describes as "the mobilization of the masses." This mobilization, "when it arises out of the war of liberation, introduces into each man's consciousness the ideas of a common cause, of a national destiny, and of a collective history" (93). The trauma in progress is the collective history of Ireland, particularly the history of the Republic of Ireland and the Northern Irish Catholic community.

Breaking the Cycle:
Friel's Intervention into National Trauma

Friel, a contemporary Irish playwright whose history and identity have been formed from the national events that shaped both the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland, responds to the Irish trauma through his plays. In his plays he guides his audiences to the trauma, to the ruptured void, to the deep crevasse that is a wound in the Irish identity, and grants those lost, silenced narratives a space to be told. Echoing the rupture that has occurred in Ireland, Friel writes into many of his plays a moment of rupture where his characters speak from that silenced gap and tell the narratives that have been lost for many years. Author Lauren F. Winner writes about the power of a rupture in a text, stating that "the ruptures are the most interesting part of any text; … in the ruptures we learn something new" (8). While textual ruptures may be the most interesting

and exciting part of a narrative, historical ruptures caused by trauma—though admittedly teaching something new—are usually anything but exciting. For the Irish, the Northern Irish, and specifically the Northern Irish Catholics, the ruptures in their pasts have been painful and traumatic. Friel, however, responds to the historical ruptures of Ireland's past by utilizing the textual rupture in a new way. In his textual ruptures, Friel gives power to that breaking, breaching moment and allows his characters a chance to speak from and to the trauma that once silenced them. Friel adds yet another layer to his moment of rupture, as the characters that speak in those moments are almost always female.

Entering the Circle:
The Colonized Female

By using the female voice in the moment of rupture, Friel responds to another trauma present in Ireland, one that stems from the effects of colonization but is played out in a drastically different way: it is the trauma of the colonized female. In July of 1909, under her pen-name Maca, Constance de Markievicz wrote about this trauma in a nationalist/feminist Irish newspaper. She wrote:

> As our country has had her Freedom and her Nationhood taken from her by England, so also our sex is denied emancipation and citizenship by the same enemy. So therefore the first step on the road to freedom is to realise ourselves as Irishwomen—not only as Irish or merely as women, but as Irishwomen doubly enslaved, and with a double battle to fight. (qtd. in Owens 112)

This trauma of the doubly enslaved female exists in many colonial settings because of the effect of this specific form of oppression on the colonized identity. "The native is an oppressed person whose permanent dream is to become the persecutor" (Fanon 53). The male native, who has lost nearly all power under the grips of the colonizer, executes the little power he has left by exerting unyielding patriarchy, oppressing the native female.

Fanon describes this effect as it occurred in Algeria. “We observe a permanent seesaw between African unity, which fades quicker and quicker into the mists of oblivion, and a heartbreaking return to chauvinism in its most bitter and detestable form” (157). As chauvinism takes over in a post-colonial/colonial setting, the experience of the female is altered dramatically. Two traumas now define her identity: the trauma of colonization of the nation, and the trauma of the colonization of the female. This dynamic is explained by Spivak: “It is both as object of colonialist historiography and as subject of insurgency, the ideological construction of gender keeps the male dominant. If, in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow” (28). Forced into shadow and denied the right to speak out against both nation and patriarchy, the female subaltern suffers under layers of trauma which haunt her existence and form in her a new identity.

Trinh Minh-ha, post-colonialist author of *Woman, Native, Other: Writing Postcoloniality and Feminism*, writes about women who are trapped, trying to find a balance between who they are and who they are supposed to be:

> In trying to tell something, a woman is told, shredding herself into opaque words while her voice dissolves on the walls of silence…. She has been warned of the risk she incurs by letting words run off the rails, time and again tempted by the desire to gear herself to the accepted norms. (79)

The colonized female is constantly forced into a role of subservience, expected to play the part dictated to her by her colonizers and expected to play it well. The colonized female’s role is more complicated than that of the colonized male because of the dual colonization to which she falls victim. Trinh depicts this delicate role as “the rails” on which the colonized woman must remain balanced. For Trinh, the doubly colonized

woman must tread lightly as she plays her role, not only in fear of the power of the colonizer, but also in fear of undermining the pride of self-assertion of the colonized male. These dually colonized women are reduced to mere constructions by the patriarchies that define their females as second-class citizens, denying these women the right of authority. These constructions are not just limiting; they are based on inaccuracies. Ania Loomba writes that "such constructions were based on certain observed features, the imperatives of the colonists, and preconceptions about the natives" (110). In constructing the identity of the native, the colonizer (in the case of the female, it can be either national colonizer or male) projects a desired role onto the native, which is invariably self-serving. The construction of the native identity is thus a tool for the colonizer, used to maintain power over the native. The colonized female's trauma, the one that repeats itself in her mind, is the experience of having her identity constructed for her twice, of being dually colonized. Even within her own racial group she misses the experience of being able to speak her gender oppression; she is silenced in that trauma, pushed into the crevasse created by the rupture of trauma, because the national trauma takes the foreground.

Kristen Holst Petersen writes that in the colonized woman's double oppression, "the discussion is between feminist emancipation versus the fight against neo-colonialism, particularly in its cultural aspect. In other words, which is the more important, which comes first, the fight for female equality or the fight against Western cultural imperialism" (252). The colonized woman misses the gendered aspect of her oppression because she is focused on the imperialist battle; she decides to fight first against the colonizer of the nation. In doing so women in colonial environments neglect

the fight occurring within their own country, among the natives: the fight for equality of the sexes. The unique trauma of the female arises when she *misses* the experience of gendered colonization. The female trauma then, exists on a new level when she must put aside the battle for gender equality in order to engage in a battle against a national colonizer.

Yet some women in Ireland's history refused to separate the two battles. In the early twentieth-century, as Ireland was putting together the Home Rule Bill that eventually led to the split of the island into what is now Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, the Irish Women's Franchise League (IWFL) worked towards including a 'votes for women' clause included in the Bill that was then under consideration. One of the members, Margaret Cousins, wrote later about the decision:

> We were as keen as men on the freedom of Ireland, but we saw the men clamouring for amendments which suited their own interests and made no recognition of the existence of women as fellow citizens. We women were convinced that anything which improved the status of women would improve, not hinder, the coming of real national self-government. (qtd. in Owens 84)

But this opinion was not shared by all women fighting for a Home Rule for Ireland. In her book *A Social History of Women in Ireland 1870-1970* Rosemary Cullen Owens writes, "During the crucial Home Rule years of 1912 -1914 a[n]… argument was made against suffrage agitation by male and female Home Rulers and caused many women to submerge their suffrage views" (109). These women believed that national freedom was more important than gender equality, and some felt that once the national issue was sorted out, the gender inequality would gradually diminish. Indeed women like Mary

MacSwiney, a member of the Munster Women's Franchise League (MWFL) and a prominent supporter of the republican cause, argued:

> To maintain that Home Rule is not Home Rule, and should not be accepted unless women are included is puerile. No question but the Home Rule one will turn a single vote at an Irish election until Home Rule is finally attained. The women of Ireland want the vote, but they do not want it, nor would they take it at the expense of Home Rule. (qtd. in Owens 109)

The female population in Ireland was split over their dual trauma, and some feared that the Home Rule Bill would be rejected by the male population because of the women's rights attached to it. Eventually even males who originally supported the 'votes for women' clause in the Home Rule Bill changed their minds, fearing the clause would mean that Ireland would not be able to attain Home Rule. Eventually the Bill went on without the clause.

The gendered form of dual colonization, the silencing of the female voice, continued in Northern Ireland after the split because of the political situation. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, during the height of the Troubles, as Northern Ireland experienced a civil rights movement, women again began to recognize their unique traumatic experience. As their predecessors had done with the Home Rule Bill, many women used the platform of the movement to speak out against that oppression. Historian Myrtle Hill, author of *Women in Ireland: a Century of Change* explains:

> While Northern Ireland also witnessed the emergence of a 'women's movement', it is more difficult to separate this struggle from broader campaigns for social justice in the region in these years. The various strands were often tightly interwoven… and many women themselves would not have seen them as distinct or separate issues. For many activists, for example, female inequality was only one consequence of colonial oppression, while others, accepting the legitimacy of the state,

> saw the need for no more than gender reform in the liberal tradition. (158 – 59)

The traumatic experience of the gender inequality is complicated in Northern Ireland because of issues of class and political separation. Despite the fact that both Catholic and Protestant communities experience political unrest in Northern Ireland, "women in these communities experience these things in distinctive, gendered ways. Moreover, referring to women's inclusions in and admissions to, or exclusions from party politics…Eilish Rooney argues that these are 'not the same for Catholic women as they are for Protestant women'" (Hill 159). The nature of the political instability adds complexity to the trauma for women in Northern Ireland. Although all of the women in the North have felt the inequality, almost half of the women—the Catholic minority—experience the dual colonization, while the other half—the Protestant majority—experience only the trauma of gender oppression. Despite the commonality of being oppressed by the men in their country, the women cannot unite and mobilize because their political differences separate them.

Reinvention and Intervention:
Friel Reinstates Voice

Friel writes plays that speak of both the colonial oppression and the gender war that occur within Ireland. His plays are a response to a traumatized nation, a step in the healing process, and they speak truth about the trauma that occurred throughout the history of the countries. Some of his plays were written only a year after a traumatic event, others nearly 150 years later, but each of his plays responds to the trauma of a colonized history. The crisis of trauma, both national and individual, race-related, colonial, or otherwise, is its inability to be grasped and articulated in its moment of

occurrence; the inevitable conclusion of this crisis is the impossibility to represent trauma. Yet I argue that through the theatrical technique of the moment of rupture, Friel breaks through this impossibility and is able to represent and speak from the ruptured space of both the national trauma and the trauma of the female.

Friel is unique among his contemporaries in that his plays seek to represent trauma on these two levels. A potential problem that arises in representing historical moments of crisis—moments of trauma—onstage is that theatre can become simply a re-presentation of that moment, rather than an intervention into that moment. The traumatic event, then, is merely replayed and not truly expressed or worked through because of the nature of trauma—that it is inexpressible.

Throughout history, various playwrights have used the theatre as a medium to respond to traumatic events. The stage has become a space where representations of such traumas are played out before audiences. Theatre scholar Diana Taylor cautions her readers about representations: "As we all know, representations are not innocent, transparent, or true. They do not simply 'reflect' reality; they help constitute it" (21). There are two delicate issues that a playwright must balance if s/he wishes to use his/her art to successfully respond to a traumatic moment in history. The first is that one does not want simply to repeat the trauma but to intervene; the other is that history can never be represented innocently but is always a re/construction. Friel responds to these dilemmas by altering his version of history in a unique way that allows both actor and observer to visit the trauma and work through it. Caruth agrees that there is a way to intervene with trauma, saying that theatre can "explore the possibility of a faithful history in the very indirectness of this telling" (27). Friel's technique is to remain realistic in his retelling of

the moments of trauma as a way of placing his characters and his audience in very specific moments, of both time and place, in Ireland's history. Indeed, his plays seem to *begin* as re-presentations without intervention and with no pathway on which individuals may move through the trauma. At specific points in his plays, however, Friel utilizes the moment of rupture to break through the re-presentation to a new level of awareness. This technique allows both character and audience an opportunity to view the trauma through a new lens, permitting movement through and beyond the trauma.

The moment of rupture functions differently in each play, but it always achieves the same purpose: to *intervene* in the process of trauma and colonialism on the levels of both nation and female. The plays which utilize the moment of rupture are always realistic, but Friel writes a heightened level of theatricality into these moments in order to rupture the realism and the characters' identities. In the moment of rupture the characters break through their oppression to articulate for the first time their trauma either through speech, soliloquy, or dance. Once the moment has occurred and passed, Friel gracefully moves his characters back into their realistic settings and speech patterns and, in doing so, challenges his audience to reexamine the rest of the play by way of the altered moment.

Throughout this dissertation I examine Friel's technique of the moment of rupture in his plays *The Freedom of the City*, *Translations*, and *Dancing at Lughnasa*. These three plays in particular support the idea that "Friel's view of Ireland was linked at a very fundamental level to his art as a whole, and that no picture of his social and political themes would be complete, or could even make sense, without setting it in the context of Irish social and political development" (Corbett 1). Like many of Friel's plays, *The*

Freedom of the City, *Translations*, and *Dancing at Lughnasa* are written with specificity of location and time, as "in all the plays, the setting is as important and resonant as the words" (Corbett 71). These three plays use the backdrop of these traumatic moments in Ireland's history as Friel interacts with the schizophrenic community of which he is a product. In *The Freedom of the City* Bloody Sunday and the Widgery Report provide the emotional and political setting for his characters. *Translations* wrestles with the erasure of the Irish language as the mapping process of the English Ordnance Survey occurs in the very room where the majority of the action of the play takes place. Finally, *Dancing at Lughnasa* struggles with modernization as a small community adjusts to living in a newly separated country. While the traumatic events for the Irish provide the settings for these plays, they do not overwhelm the stories; rather, they highlight the trauma of the Irish female as Friel gracefully represents her experience through Lily in *The Freedom of the City*, Sarah in *Translations*, and the Mundy sisters in *Dancing at Lughnasa*.

Chapter One of my dissertation, "'Free (Wo)man of the City, Sure that Means Nothing'[15]: Rupturing Identity for the Colonized Female in *The Freedom of the City*," focuses on Friel's use of the backdrop of Bloody Sunday to highlight the trauma of the dually colonized female. This chapter locates the moment of rupture on a highly politicized, metaphorically silenced female character, Lily, and explores her transformation as a result of her moment of freedom. Chapter Two, "'Something is Being Eroded'[16]: The Subaltern Speaks in *Translations*," looks through the backdrop of the English Ordnance survey to unpack the oppression of the female in what is perhaps

[15] Friel, Brian. *The Freedom of the City*, pp. 165.
[16] Friel, Brian. *Translations*, pp. 420.

Friel's most famous play, *Translations*. The chapter focuses on the silent Sarah, who begs attention as the ultimate subaltern, and analyses her journey as she comes to claim her voice and speak on her own accord. Chapter Three, "'Mature Women, Dancing?'[17]: Communal Freedom in *Dancing at Lughnasa*," discusses Friel's play about a family of sisters, the Mundys, living together on the eve of the industrial revolution. The chapter offers an expansion of the power of the moment of rupture by discussing it as a communal experience expressed in the language of dance, a technique not utilized in Friel's other plays. Finally, Chapter Four, "'They're Much More Pure, My People'[18]: Friel in Context," compares Friel's female characters to the female characters of three other Irish playwrights: one from an older generation, Oscar Wilde; one from a younger generation, Martin McDonagh; and one female, Marina Carr. I compare Friel with Wilde, McDonagh, and Carr in order to place Friel within a tradition of Irish playwrights and to see how the representation of the female onstage has been altered over the years.

Irish actress Rosaleen Linehan speaks to Friel's graceful representation of the female. "Most actresses are a little in love with and in awe of Brian for his gifts to women" (letter to the author). This dissertation explores Friel's specific tactics to guide his audience to and through these traumas as he takes his performers and viewers on a journey of not only the Irish female, but of the Irish experience.

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[17] Friel, Brian. *Dancing at Lughnasa*, pp. 25.
[18] Friel, Brian. *Making History*, pp. 313.

CHAPTER ONE

"FREE (WO)MAN OF THE CITY, SURE THAT MEANS NOTHING"[1]: RUPTURING IDENTITY FOR THE COLONIZED FEMALE IN *THE FREEDOM OF THE CITY*

> *As for the families of Bloody Sunday, may their twenty-six-year quest for the truth bring about a peace that allows them to move forward, without the weight and hurt of the past.*
>
> *—Tom Patchett*[2]

On 20 February 1973, only a year after the traumatic event of Northern Ireland's Bloody Sunday, *The Freedom of the City*, by contemporary Irish playwright Brian Friel, opened at the Abbey Theatre in Dublin. Friel situates the play in Derry, Northern Ireland, the same city as Bloody Sunday but two years earlier, in 1970. Historically, 1970 was at the height of the Northern Irish Troubles, a common name for the years between 1969 and 1998 when Nationalists and Republicans (or Catholics) raised their voices in protest against British rule in Northern Ireland. During the Troubles violence erupted across the country and for thirty years a war was fought on the streets of Northern Ireland, resulting in the deaths of over 3,500 people. While *The Freedom of the City* is primarily a response to the traumatic moment of Bloody Sunday, this chapter aims to examine Friel's use of the historical frame to point towards another trauma—that of the twice colonized, silenced woman, as represented by the only female character in the play, Lily Doherty. Through alteration of the historical details of Bloody Sunday Friel highlights the

[1] Friel, Brian. *The Freedom of the City*, pp. 165.
[2] "The River," pp. 115.

traumatic experience of the female while simultaneously wrestling with the 30 January 1972 trauma.

By examining the female character in the play, we can see that the play is, at its core, a reaction to two traumas, Bloody Sunday and the dually colonized female, and Friel characterizes Lily as a victim of both. Friel's careful navigation through the trauma of the national event has led scholars to overlook the second trauma—that of the doubly oppressed female. Claudia Harris, one of the few theatre scholars to address the issue of gender in Friel's plays, writes in her article "The Engendered Space: Performing Friel's women from Cass McGuire to Molly Sweeney," that in *The Freedom of the City* "the issue of gender is, for the most part, insignificant" (64). I argue that the issue of gender in the play is not insignificant but rather heightened by the frame of Bloody Sunday. The political backdrop of the play, coupled with the fact that Lily is the only female character—and the actress playing her is, therefore, the only female body on the stage—draws attention to her specific crisis.

Within the play, Lily, a Northern Irish Catholic who marches for civil rights, struggles under the effects of colonial rule and suffers from a consequence of this governmental colonization—unyielding patriarchy, where the males in her country who have lost their power to the British colonizer attempt to assert what power they have left by victimizing women. Friel dramatizes this specific crisis in *The Freedom of the City* but writes for Lily a *moment of rupture* where she breaks through her colonization, articulating and realizing, for the first time, her oppression. In this moment of heightened theatricality, Friel responds to both traumas, that of the nation and that of the female, releasing the character Lily from the doubly oppressed world in which she lives and

demonstrating the power of the colonized victim. Here Friel gives voice to the silenced narratives, lost into the crevasse. The moment of rupture serves as a pathway by which the audience is able to navigate the traumas that they have *missed* (Caruth 62), allowing the survivors a chance to move beyond the traumas that continue to haunt their lives. While the play certainly deals with issues outside of the crisis of the dually colonized female, this chapter explores the often overlooked notions of gender and trauma in Friel's play *The Freedom of the City* and analyzes the efficacy of these ideas for healing scars left on the Irish over generations of oppression.

A Violent Tale:
Bloody Sunday and *The Freedom of the City*

On 30 January 1972, during a march in the city of Derry, Northern Ireland British paratroopers opened fire at the crowd of peaceful protestors, marching for civil rights and equality between the Catholic and Protestant communities. British fire killed fourteen Catholic men. That day would forever be remembered in Northern Ireland as Bloody Sunday. For the Northern Irish Catholics, Bloody Sunday was a violent climax in the struggle for a freedom of identity against colonization. Friel's play intersects with this traumatic moment in Ireland's history, as it begins with three dead bodies lying grotesquely on the ground. This striking image immediately tells his audience that the play offers no hope of survival for these characters. Through theatrical techniques the play confronts the historical moment and escorts the audience to the trauma in the early moments of the play.

The Freedom of the City dramatizes the events of Bloody Sunday on an intimate scale. In the play British soldiers end a banned march using tear gas and water cannons,

weapons that were used against marchers at Bloody Sunday. To avoid the chaos, three marchers, Lily, Skinner, and Michael, take refuge in a nearby building. They later discover that they have accidentally landed in the Mayor's parlour in the Guildhall, a highly politicized building in Derry. In the end the characters, all Catholic but from different backgrounds, leave the parlour, hands above their heads, where they are shot down as "terrorists" by the British Army. Although the audience has known since the opening of the play that the characters are going to die, the final moments are chilling. Audiences are reminded of the victims of Bloody Sunday as the closing stage directions read: "*The entire stage is now black, except for a battery of spotlights beaming on the faces of the three. Pause. Then the air is filled with a fifteen-second burst of automatic fire. It stops. The three stand as before, staring out; their hands above their heads*" (168-69).

Prior to 1973, despite being born into a Catholic family in Northern Ireland, and having constant engagement with the colonized Northern Ireland, Friel had shied away from writing blatantly political texts. In February of 1970, when questioned about whether or not he would write about the outbreak of violence in Northern Ireland that began in the late 60s, Friel said he would not, replying, "First of all, I am emotionally much too involved about it; secondly, because the thing is in transition at the moment. A play about the civil rights situation in the North won't be written, I hope, for another ten or fifteen years" (Dantanus 37). Three years later, Friel's most politically charged play, *The Freedom of the City,* opened.

Interestingly, when the play first opened Friel denied any links the play might have to Bloody Sunday. Just prior to the play's premiere at the Abbey Theatre Friel said in an interview:

> [*The Freedom of the City* is] not about Bloody Sunday. In fact, the play began long before Bloody Sunday happened. I was working on this theme for about ten months before Bloody Sunday.… This play raises the old problem of writing about events which are still happening. It's the old problem of the distinction between the mind that suffers and the man who creates. The trouble with this particular play in many ways is that people are going to find something immediate in it, some kind of reportage. And I don't think that's in it at all…. This is a play which is about poverty. (Delaney 112)

Friel's comment points towards the impact that Bloody Sunday had on society. The immense rupture of the event left an imprint on those who were involved either directly or indirectly, to such a degree that Friel spoke publicly about his fears that the play could not be viewed without the frame of Bloody Sunday infecting it.

Bloody Sunday, and the subsequent investigation known as the Widgery report that found the soldiers innocent of any crimes and/or responsibility for the deaths of that day, divided the communities in Northern Ireland to extremes that had never before been witnessed. Voices were literally silenced when the dead fell, and the trauma of that day formed a scar on the Catholic community. In 1992, twenty-six year old Maureen Shiels said of Bloody Sunday:

> People have described the day of the Bloody Sunday march as a beautiful day, the atmosphere quite carnival, which would indicate that these people were not out to start any sort of trouble—they were just out to have their voices heard. (qtd. in Ziff 110)

For Shiels, who was only eight years old at the time of the event, Bloody Sunday left an open wound that has never completely healed. "Fourteen people were murdered, and five

of them were my neighbors. Five people within a hundred yards of where you lived is a lot of people to die in one street. To see five coffins and not knowing which funeral to go to…" (qtd. in Ziff 111). Shiel's story speaks of the widening gap between the Protestant and Catholic communities in Northern Ireland. This breach was enlarged by the violence of Bloody Sunday and the trauma the Catholic community endured when setting out to march for civil rights.

The trauma of Bloody Sunday for the Northern Irish Catholic community was caused not only by the brutality against the victims, but also by the Widgery "whitewashing" that occurred afterwards. Lord Widgery's findings caused a trauma that widened the crevasse, further rupturing the Irish identity, and silencing hundreds of Irish voices by denying them the right to tell their stories.

> The extent to which these voices were vanquished did not become apparent until, in his last assiduous researches into the evidence collected for the Widgery Tribunal, Don Mullan came across more than five hundred eyewitness accounts collected by the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association (NICRA) and National Council for Civil Liberties (NCCL). Widgery apparently had a look at fifteen of them before dismissing the rest out of hand. As Seamus Deane observes in the course of an interview in *The Bloody Sunday Murders*, the subsequent verdict arrived at by the Widgery Tribunal thus perpetrated not only an injustice but the legal humiliation of an entire community. (Ziff 104)

With the weight of these traumas attached to Bloody Sunday, understandably Friel originally distanced himself from this troubling event, although later he acknowledged that the event and the play are inextricably linked. Because of its focus on the Bloody Sunday event, the play has been called at times a docu-drama, a troublesome description as Christopher Fitz-Simon notes: "Sometimes categorized as 'documentary drama', [*The Freedom of the City*] is far too profound in its analysis of outrage, too complex in its

constructions, too amusing (given the circumstances) on the shibboleths of Orange and Green, to be so conventionally labeled" (119). It is important to note that Friel does change certain facts about the event within his play to keep it from being a simple re-presentation of history. It is those changes that allows this play to speak to the trauma of Bloody Sunday, because without them Friel would risk scaring away audiences. He set the play two years earlier, focused on three rather than fourteen deaths, and—most significantly—included a woman among the victims.

Despite Friel's original attempts to separate the play from the traumatic event, so that the play might be able to continue to be produced, Irish audiences and reviewers of the premiere could not help but, as Friel worried, find the "immediacy" in the play and link the story to Bloody Sunday (Coult 49). Desmond Rushe, in his review of the Abbey production in 1973, writes, "Mr. Friel uses the Bloody Sunday situation merely as a frame… and the play becomes a commentary on the social conditions that make a Bloody Sunday possible" ("Dublin: Ferment Has Outlet on Stage" par. 2). Despite the changes to the script and Friel's attempt, at first, to distance the play from it inspiration, the political link affected the premiere productions.

> The huge sensitivity of the subject was made clear… when the New York production folded after only nine performances. This wasn't only the normal Broadway critics' response to a play deemed to be uncommercial, but a response to the fact that the play took seriously the claims for justice and freedom of the Catholic/Republican minority. The reaction was similar even in the supposedly more sophisticated London press. Reports of bomb scares at the Royal Court Theatre in London contributed to an atmosphere of danger and unease around the play. (Coult 50)

After the original press surrounding the play in the early 1970s, the production sat silent for a while. Then, in the 1980s, Friel brought the play to the world's attention again when

he contradicted his earlier statement admitting that the play was indeed written about Bloody Sunday. "*The Freedom of the City* was a more reckless play … because it was written out of the kind of anger at the Bloody Sunday events in Derry" (Murray, *Brian Friel Essays, Diaries, Interviews* 125). In an interview with Fintan O'Toole Friel discussed his participation in the January 30th march, articulating the trauma he endured that spurred him to write his most political play.

> The experience of Bloody Sunday wasn't quite distilled in me. … It was really—do you remember that time?—it was a very emotive time. It was really a shattering experience that the British Army, this disciplined instrument, would go in as they did that time and shoot thirteen people. To be there on that occasion and—I didn't actually see people get shot—but I mean, to have to throw yourself on the ground because people are firing at you is a very terrifying experience. Then the whole cover-up afterwards was shattering too. (Murray, *Brian Friel Essays, Diaries, Interviews* 173)

Friel responded to the trauma of survival by writing a play which utilizes familiar images and experiences of the actual traumatic event. The images, however, are altered slightly so that the representation of the trauma does not simply become a re-presentation of the experience itself.

The opening of *The Freedom of the City* is wrought with visceral images, sounds, and lines, all of which remind audiences familiar with Bloody Sunday and the Widgery Tribunal of the trauma of the event. One iconic photograph of Bloody Sunday is of a Priest, Fr. Daly, holding a bloodied white handkerchief above his head; news crews captured the powerful image on film. As a group of men carried the dying victim Jackie Duddy out of what had quickly become a battlefield, the red-stained white handkerchief stood out among the images of paratroopers and guns.

Fig. 2.1 Father Daly waving a bloodied handkerchief as Jackie Duddy's body is carried away from the scene.

Photograph by Fred Hoare/Belfast Telegraph.

The Freedom of the City recalls this image in the opening moments of the play. The stage directions read:

> *The stage is in darkness except for the apron which is lit in cold blue. Three bodies lie grotesquely across the front of the stage – Skinner on the left, Lily in the middle, Michael on the right. After a silence has been established we hear in the very far distance a wail of an ambulance siren. …A priest enters right, crouching…and holding a white handkerchief above his head.* (107)

In the opening sequence of *The Freedom of the City* the priest performs the Last Rites to the three victims of the march, just as Fr. Daly did for Jackie Duddy, as seen below in

this memorable photograph taken moments after the famous white handkerchief was raised.

Fig. 2.2 Father Daly administers the Last Rites to a victim of Bloody Sunday.
Photograph by Stanley Matchett, Stanley Matchett Photography.

Immediately after this opening, the scene shifts in both time and space to the inside of a courthouse where the audience encounters a judge who is holding a tribunal to uncover the events that caused the death of the three victims. The Judge begins by interviewing a policeman about the victims and their personal history. Upon the conclusion of that interview the Judge states:

> This tribunal of inquiry, appointed by her Majesty's Government, is in no sense a court of justice. Our only function is to form an objective view of the events which occurred in the City of Londonderry, Northern Ireland, on the tenth day of February 1970, when after a civil rights meeting British troops opened fire and three civilians lost their lives. (Friel 109)

The Judge and his monologue call to mind Lord Widgery and his opening statement at the Inquiry.

A few moments later time and space shift again and the audience hears from offstage a "*civil rights meeting*" that is *"being held in Guildhall Square*" (110), the precise location at which the January 30th march was supposed to conclude. While the march is heard from offstage, the character of Dodds is introduced. He is an American sociologist whose field of study is "the culture of poverty or more accurately the subculture of poverty" (110), and while he "explains" the lifestyle that makes possible events like the death of the three lower class citizens, his speech is interrupted by military noises and screams offstage.

> *Suddenly all sounds are drowned by the roar of approaching tanks. Their noise is deafening and fills the whole auditorium. They stop. Silence for five seconds. Then the WOMAN who is addressing the meeting:*
> WOMAN. Stand your ground! Don't move! Don't panic! This is your city! This is your city!
> *Her voice is drowned out by shooting – rubber bullets and CS gas and immediate pandemonium in the crowd. Panic. Screaming. Shouting. The revving of engines as tanks and water-cannon pursue fleeing groups. More rubber bullets and the quick plop of exploding gas-canisters.* (111)

This description, paired with the sounds heard in the theatre, recall the trauma of Bloody Sunday. "With the exception of the use of tanks… the military operation as it is described in *The Freedom of the City* bears close similarity to the military operation of Bloody Sunday" (Pilkington 196-97). In addition, Friel's choice of the female voice shouting, "Stand your ground!" calls to mind Bernadette Devlin, a civil rights activist who is reported to have said those exact words on 30 January 1972 when the soldiers first arrived at the march (Schrank 123). By recalling these images and major players of the

traumatic event in the first few moments of the play, Friel places audiences familiar with Bloody Sunday in that moment, escorting his audience into the trauma.

After the chaotic opening of the play, the audience learns that the three main characters, Lily, Michael, and Skinner, members of the colonized Catholic minorities in a Protestant-run country, have participated in a civil rights march that ended in violence. To escape the hail of rubber bullets, weapons commonly used during the Troubles and specifically during Bloody Sunday, the three retreat to the interior of the Guildhall in various states. Michael has inhaled CS gas; Skinner is soaked, having been hit with a water cannon; and Lily is emotionally overwhelmed by the violence that erupted during the march. The rest of the play works as a "sequence of flashbacks in the course of a Widgery-like British government inquiry that concludes by exculpating the army and suggesting that the three may have emerged firing from the Guildhall" (Pilkington 197). The audience gradually learns that this claim regarding the exit of the characters is false, and not even plausible. The Judge who presides over the Inquiry in the play refers to the three as "terrorists," (Friel 134) an act that reduces and wrongly categorizes them. Yet there are other characters in the peripheral world outside the Guildhall who have a more sympathetic view of the three characters inside the Guildhall. The outside perspectives are fascinating: some speak of the conditions of poverty which factor prominently in the double oppressed condition in which Lily lives; others glorify the three as heroes, but speak of the individuals in a masculine voice, a sign of the patriarchal environment that contributes to Lily's trauma. Some speak from outside the Guildhall while the three characters are still within, while others speak from a future perspective, outside the timeframe of the three.

Professor Dodds is part of the latter group. A member of academia, he—just as much as the judge—mistakenly reduces the three characters to subjects that fit a mold. Dodds stands as the figure who believes that horrific events can be explained by simple sociological theories: in this case, the subculture of poverty. Dodds never mentions the names of the three victims, but rather clumps them together as part of a group.

> If you are born into the subculture of poverty, what do you inherit? Well, you inherit an economic condition, and you inherit a social and psychological condition…. And of course the economic environment conditions the psychological and social man so that he constantly feels inferior, marginal, helpless, dependent. Another inheritance is his inability to control impulse: he is present-time orientated and seldom defers gratification, never plans for the future, and endures his here and now with resignation and frustration. (133)

The irony of Dodds's speech is that the three victims have died because of their *refusal* to endure their "here and now with resignation and frustration". This is witnessed in a scene only a few moments earlier in the play when Michael assesses the march and discusses its importance with pride saying, "It was a good, disciplined, responsible march. And that's what we must show them – that we're responsible and respectable; and they'll come to respect what we're campaigning for" (128-29). As Dodds continues throughout the play to discuss in sociological terms the conditions that create violence, the audience witnesses a juxtaposition of his description of a stereotype (that the three within the Guildhall *should* fit) and the people these characters actually are.

But Dodds is not the only character who misdiagnoses the three within the Guildhall; the characters' fellow Catholics misconstrue the situation too. The Priest who performed their Last Rites says of the three at a Mass,

> They died for their beliefs. They died for their fellow citizens. They died because they could no longer endure the injuries and injustices and

> indignities that have been their lot for too many years. They sacrificed their lives so that you and I and thousands like us might be rid of that iniquitous yoke and might inherit a decent way of life. (125)

The Priest likens their deaths to a martyr's willing sacrifice when the reality is much more gruesome and less magnanimous. Liam O'Kelly, a Catholic news reporter, claims, "There are no reports of serious casualties but unconfirmed reports are coming in that a group of about fifty armed gunmen have taken possession of the Guildhall here below me and have barricaded themselves in" (117). And finally the singing Balladeer solidifies the Catholic mindset of the heroism of the three in his song:

> A hundred Irish heroes on February day
> Took over Derry's Guildhall, beside old Derry's quay.
> They defied the British army, they defied the RUC
> They showed the crumbling empire what good Irishmen could be. (118)

Friel juxtaposes the British references of Lily, Michael, and Skinner as terrorists and "yobbos" (117) with the Catholics' references to the three as heroes. This same dichotomy occurred in the categorizing of the victims in Bloody Sunday. *The Freedom of the City*, does not, however, only address the trauma of Bloody Sunday; rather Friel uses the frame of Bloody Sunday to speak to another trauma that arises as a result of colonization—the trauma of the dually colonized female.

Interestingly, Dodds, O'Kelly, and the Balladeer, all refer to the victims in the masculine voice, as evidenced in the above lines. Indeed the victims of the historical Bloody Sunday were all men, most under the age of twenty-one, which Friel hints at in the youthful characters Skinner (age 21) and Michael (age 21). But Lily (age 43), the third and final victim in the play, stands out because she is the only female character in the play, when no female died in Bloody Sunday. Also, she is considerably older than the

other characters. There was one woman who was seriously injured during Bloody Sunday, Margaret (Peggy) Deery, who like Lily was mother to a large number of children. Only three months prior to Bloody Sunday Deery had lost her husband to a long illness; similarly Lily discusses how she cares for her ill spouse. After Deery was shot in the thigh, the soldier came towards her as though to shoot her again, but she pleaded with him, "Mister don't shoot, I've fourteen children and I'm all they have" (Pringle and Jacobson 150). As Lily's story is revealed throughout the play, she echoes the voice of Peggy Deery and the legacy she left on Bloody Sunday. Yet Lily's trauma goes deeper than the violence of the march. Although there are similarities to Peggy Derry, Lily is not meant to stand in for any one victim of Bloody Sunday; rather, she stands in as Ireland's female, and through this character the victimization of the woman is revealed.

A Different Wound: Lily and the Irish Female

Ania Loomba articulates the crisis of the doubly oppressed woman: "Colonialism intensified patriarchal relations in colonized lands, often because native men, increasingly disenfranchised and excluded from the public sphere, became more tyrannical at home" (168). A colonized country, then, often results in a space where women are silenced, whether physically or politically. This is the landscape Friel paints in *The Freedom of the City*.

Lily Doherty is this woman, silenced as a consequence of colonization. Her name, Elizabeth (Lily) Marigold Doherty, with its two flowers, emphasizes her femininity in a male dominated world. Lily is marginalized by the men surrounding her—trapped by their desire to colonize. Their reductive preconceptions about her determine her life and

ultimately silence her. This silencing is her trauma—her inability to articulate her identity and life. Like the experience of the Bloody Sunday victims, the trauma of the female is her *missing* of the experience, her lacking the language and ability to speak for herself. Throughout the play Lily's identity is constructed by the men surrounding her, whether by her sick husband at home (whom she calls the Chairman) or by Skinner and Michael, the two men with her in the Mayor's parlour. Within this construction, Lily is contained in the role of the unintelligent homemaker, one who has no real understanding of politics or of the world. Because her husband is unable to work, Lily has taken a job as a cleaning woman, but her main duty is to keep house for her husband and eleven children, as she reveals saying, "It's time we were all leaving. They'll be waiting for me to make the tea" (Friel 139). This line reveals the shallowness of the Chairman's perception of Lily. Lily anticipates her husband waiting at home for her to arrive to make the tea. Or, as Lily tells Skinner later, she envisions the Chairman waiting and "hoping to God I'll remember to bring him home five fags" (141). She does not, as one might expect, picture him waiting nervously for news of his wife's safety after she participated in a march that ended in CS gas, tanks, and water cannons. Lily functions in her home as caretaker, but no one worries about her or thinks of her as politically active.

Upon first entering the Guildhall, Skinner and Michael immediately begin to make assumptions about Lily. As they recover from the assault against them, the three enter into conversation, processing what has just occurred. Clearly from three different backgrounds, the characters talk about the one thing they have in common—the protest they had just been a part of. As they converse about the way in which the British Army began attacking the protestors, Lily marvels, "They come on us very sudden, didn't

they?" (114). Immediately Skinner, the more aggressive of the two men whose name sounding like "Skin Her" suggestively speaks to his hostility towards women, challenges Lily in her assumed ignorance.

> SKINNER. Did no one tell you the march was banned?
> LILY. I knew the march was banned.
> SKINNER. Did you expect them to give you tea at the end of it? (114)

Skinner's reaction to Lily questions her strength as a protestor. He ridicules her domesticity and her shock at the violence that occurred. He suggests sarcastically that she perhaps believed the march was something as silly as a tea party, arguing that she did not have a right to be at such a violent protest if she did not know it was banned. Here begins the men's limited perception of Lily. In this moment the male projected identity onto the female becomes evident. It is through Skinner's comments that his construction of the female is revealed, as he places Lily in a specific box. Or, as Trinh Minh-ha would say, on a specific thin rail, articulating that the colonized female is constantly aware of the risk of "letting her words run off the rails" (79). Skinner states his belief that women do not, and perhaps cannot, understand the true depth of politics and the dangers that lie in a fight for freedom.

As the play progresses, the three characters learn more about one another, and the men's preconceptions about the female identity become more evident. Michael, the quieter, more pensive of the two men, who firmly believes in the goodness of humanity, reveals that he is a scholar of sorts, that he is educated. Upon learning this, Skinner attacks Lily, turning the conversation away from Michael, asking "Are *you* smart, Lily?" (Friel 122). In his direct questioning, Skinner again degrades Lily, assuming the answer he is about to receive. "Me? I could never do nothing right at school except carry round

the roll books. And when the inspector would come they used to lock me in the cloakroom with the Mad Mulligans. Lucky for my wanes the chairman's got the brains" (122). Friel subtly writes into this line the depth of Lily's trauma; she reveals to the audience that since childhood she has been told that she was incapable and unintelligent. She was hidden from the inspector of her school in fear of the discovery of this child who lacked "brains." In her comment, Lily reveals that she believes she is, in fact, stupid, and she is grateful that her children have a smart father, "the Chairman" – a title which shows that Lily recognizes his (presumed) authority. Following Lily's comment, Skinner changes the subject, apparently pleased with her reaction. He does not try to refute it, nor does he say he too is not all that smart; he simply moves on, after performing his own role in the patriarchal society as the oppressor, having forced Lily to not only deny any intellect she might have, but to credit her children's astuteness to her husband, to the man in her life. In his writing, Friel suggests that this character has lived her life trapped in a male-projected image. Her oppressors have reduced her spirit to the point where she cannot begin to imagine an identity beyond that which has been constructed for her. So she plays the role; she rides her rails without protest.

Skinner is not the only one who colonizes Lily, since Michael too speaks for her. This is a tool used by the colonizer to keep the native in her constructed identity. However, unlike Skinner, Michael seems unaware of how this tool functions as an act of oppression. He is oblivious to his role in the gender war that is taking place around him. He says to Lily, "You know what you're campaigning for, Missus. You want a decent home. And you want a better life for your children than the life you had" (138). Up to this point in the play Lily has not said precisely why she marches—Michael is the first to

articulate this for her. And in the line, Lily's trauma is emphasized—her silenced voice is unable to express her own motivations. Michael's ventriloquism of Lily's motives matches the dynamic that Gayatri Spivak describes: "It is both as object of colonialist historiography and as subject of insurgency, that the ideological construction of gender keeps the male dominant. If, in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow" (28). Lily, the female subaltern, is pushed into a deep shadow. As Michael communicates what he assumes to be Lily's reasons for political action, he speaks of her home which he has not seen and her children whom he has not met, moving her into shadow so that her voice is no longer necessary. Her voice is left unheard, lost in the ever-widening crevasse. Despite being apparently more sympathetic to her than Skinner, Michael maintains his power over her. The colonized men around her restore their own battered power as they attempt to remove her history, her ability to speak, and therefore her identity.

Examining Lily through Spivak's idea of the subaltern is complicated by the fact that for most of the play Lily *does* speak, for indeed she has the most lines of any of the characters within the Guildhall. This seems to be a contradiction when viewing Lily as the constructed, doubly colonized, silenced female. But Friel maintains this struggle in the play by writing Lily's lines without substance. Theatre historian Bernice Schrank writes of Lily's manner of speaking, "It is always specific, colourful and anecdotal, miniature encapsulations of the world, stated without sentimentality or much insight into what is being revealed" (133). Friel writes out a specific unintelligent dialect for Lily, one with incorrect grammar, bizarre contractions, and small words, all of which point towards an uneducated woman. Although she speaks most often, Lily seems the most inarticulate

of the characters within the Guildhall, speaking frequently of events that seem unimportant.

When first entering the Guildhall as the two men recover from CS gas and the water cannon, Lily begins making conversation; her lines are only interrupted by Michael's coughing from the gas.

> D'you know what they say? That that [sic] CS gas is a sure cure for stuttering. Would you believe that, young fella? That's why Celia Cunningham across from us drags her wee Colm Damien into the thick of every riot from here to Strabane and him not seven till next May. (Friel 115)

Lionel Pilkington argues that Lily is "presented by Friel as the play's embodiment of spontaneous individuality" (200). Lily is certainly spontaneous, from her drinking the Mayor's "sherry," to her breaking out in song, and her decision that the Parlour should be painted in a pink gloss. Yet her individuality exists only in the trivial moments. When it comes to the real issues of the play, when asked to articulate her own experience, Lily's voice is given to her by the men around her, a reminder of the trauma of the dually colonized female, and she falls silent. Her individuality is prescribed and anything but spontaneous. Her personality is a direct result of her dual colonization.

There is, however, one moment at the beginning of Act Two where she breaks out of her stereotypical speech pattern and, for the first time, articulates her trauma. This occurs when Friel releases the character from the bars of colonization, and from the rules of realism, as the fourth wall is broken and she speaks directly to the audience. It is her moment of rupture in the play—a soliloquy given from the silenced void caused by her trauma, revealing her capability, the incorrect assessment of her by the men, and her

unquestionable intelligence. Here Lily embodies the idea of Spivak's oppressed, that "if given the chance…can speak and know their conditions" (25).

Bloodletting:
Speaking from the pain in the moment of rupture

At the beginning of Act Two, each of the three characters speaks directly to the audience in a soliloquy, expressing their own thoughts in the moment they realize they are about to die. Friel allows, in these moments, the voices of the victims to be heard. In the soliloquies all three characters lose their distinct speech patterns and instead become well-spoken, lucid, and strikingly similar, showing a moment of extreme equality, a moment when the language of the colonizer and colonized become one. Although the language and the overall subject of the three are the same (each character articulates his or her own thoughts at the moment of death), Friel's focusing of the soliloquies for each character is highly individualized. It is important to examine Skinner and Michael's soliloquies first, since theirs respond to the trauma of Bloody Sunday while Lily's reacts to both Bloody Sunday and the dually colonized female.

The soliloquies of Michael and Skinner function as moments of rupture to help guide the audience specifically through the trauma of Bloody Sunday. The audience members, who have during the first act witnessed a slightly altered representation of the traumatic event, are able to intercede into the traumatic moment and are given a chance to move past it with this theatrical device. Michael, the scholar who believes that the army will not kill them, focuses on the "mistake". He says, "My mouth kept trying to form the word mistake – mistake – mistake. And this is how I died – in disbelief, in astonishment, in shock" (Friel 150). Skinner, a "hooligan" as Michael calls him, has known all along

they would not leave the Guildhall alive. He states in his soliloquy, “A short time after I realized we were in the Mayor’s parlour I knew that a price would be exacted. … So I died, as I lived, in defensive flippancy” (150).

Lily’s soliloquy guides the audience through both traumas—that of Bloody Sunday and that of the dually colonized female. Her soliloquy challenges the members of the audience, asking them to view her differently and highlighting the ways in which society forces her into a role of submission, into a part that she never intended to play. Lily’s soliloquy is her articulation of her truama; it is a sign of her breaking through the colonization to a place where she is no longer defined by it. The soliloquy discusses her pain and terror with clarity:

> The moment we stepped outside the front door I knew I was going to die, instinctively, the way an animal knows. Jesus, they’re going to murder me. A second of panic—no more. Because it was succeeded, overtaken, overwhelmed by a tidal wave of regret, not for myself nor my family, but that life had somehow eluded me. And now it was finished; it had all seeped away; and I had never experienced it. And in the silence before my body disintegrated into purple convulsion, I thought I glimpsed a tiny truth: that life had eluded me because never once in my forty-three years had an experience, an event, even a small unimportant happening been isolated, and assessed, and articulated. And the fact that this, my last experience, was defined by this perception, that was the culmination of sorrow. In a way I died of grief. (150)

In this eloquent soliloquy Friel writes for Lily a new identity. Here Lily is free from colonization; she is the woman who *can* speak for herself and therefore end her own grief. In this powerful moment Friel alters not only Lily’s stereotypical speech patterns but her use of language revealing for her a new identity. She realizes and articulates the tragedy and the doubly-determined trap in which she was placed.

For most of the play Lily's speech is descriptive narrative, lacking analysis of the events she is describing. However, in her soliloquy, where she is released from the boundaries of her constructed identity, Lily is able to analyze that which is occurring—her imminent death. Interestingly, the soliloquy begins much like her other monologues, as a narrative. Lily begins, "The moment we stepped outside the front door I knew I was going to die." This opening statement of her soliloquy is without analysis. Quickly though, her speech moves beyond description, and Lily is able to articulate her moment of death and the emotions she is experiencing, "…instinctively, the way an animal knows." With this particular clarification, Friel begins to move Lily into her new identity and out of her trauma.

As the soliloquy continues, Lily's language begins to deconstruct her constructed identity. Her words continually surprise the audience, so that Lily is represented in a new light. The constructed Lily as seen in Act One would be irrational in her moment of death, but in the moment of rupture Lily contradicts this notion: "A second of panic—no more. Because it was succeeded, overtaken, overwhelmed by a tidal wave of regret…" Here the soliloquy suggests that Lily recognizes the limitations of language, a new insight for the character who speaks in the rest of the play without clarification. In this line, Lily uses three words, "succeeded, overtaken, overwhelmed," each more powerful than its predecessor in order to explain what seems to be inexplicable. For the first time in the play Lily takes care to be sure that she is both heard and understood; for this Lily, not just any word will suffice. In this moment Friel writes in the character a desire to be absolutely clear—a desire to articulate precisely what she means.

This same line in the soliloquy challenges Lily's constructed identity as homemaker and mother. "Because it was succeeded, overtaken, overwhelmed by a tidal wave of regret, not for myself, nor my family." In light of Lily's multiple conversations throughout the play about her eleven children, this line is both surprising and insightful. Lily's identity is not wrapped up in her role as a wife and mother; family is not the sole reason for her existence. Rather, her sorrow stems from the fact "that life had somehow eluded me." Lily's regret is for the life she could have had but did not. She elaborates saying, "I thought I glimpsed a tiny truth: that life had eluded me because never once in my forty-three years had an experience, an event, even a small unimportant happening been isolated, and assessed, and *articulated*." Freed from colonization, Lily is able to recognize the truth: that her identity has been constructed by male perceptions. Her identity, and her life, have been articulated for her by her dominators in a political and social move to maintain power over her. In this moment, Friel writes for Lily a direct response to the trauma of her oppression. "And the fact that this, my last experience, was defined by this perception, that was the culmination of sorrow. In a way I died of grief." The grief that Lily experiences comes from her realization of her trauma and her ability finally to express that trauma—that she had never articulated her own life or identity. Lily's sorrow emerges from the knowledge that she never moved out of her constructed identity. She never stepped off of the rails of the dually colonized female that Trihn so eloquently articulates. For Lily, this is what ails her most. She dies not only from the bullets that killed Skinner and Michael, the bullets of Bloody Sunday, but from the grief-filled realization that she lived her life according to another's vision of what she should be. In this powerfully articulate moment Lily is no longer Spivak's subaltern. Here Lily

can and does speak for herself, and in doing so frees herself from the grips of her colonizers. Lily's voice speaks for those victims that were never given the chance, silenced by their situation, by their trauma.

Lily's moment of rupture functions as a gateway through which the audience can move through both traumas: those of the dually colonized female and of Bloody Sunday. In this moment of rupture Friel responds to the traumas of both nation and female, breaking through the re-presentation to a new awareness and understanding for both character and audience. As Lily breaks the fourth wall and speaks directly to the members of the audience, she guides them through the traumas. The words of her soliloquy are both the pathway through the missed experience of the traumas and Friel's intervention into the historical event.

Although the soliloquies would chronologically come at the end of the play, just after the characters march outside, hands raised about their heads, Friel places them in the middle of the play at the beginning of Act Two, breaking out of the typical progression of time, and mixing up those "old unities."[3] This placement of the soliloquies only makes them more powerful. With this structure, Friel forces the audience to watch the second act with new eyes. Having seen Lily's potential for intelligence and strength, the audience questions the drastic change in Lily during Act Two and reexamines the rest of the play in light of the altered moment. During the remainder of the act the audience has a heightened awareness of the dual colonization and is able to view Lily as a victim of this

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[3] Christopher Murray says of the play, "time, place and action, the good old unities, are shuffled with such mastery that conventional outlets for audience response are blocked, and one is forced to think and feel in broken sequences, arrested and incomplete" (*Twentieth-Century Irish Drama* 200).

trauma, rather than solely as a woman who, although entertaining at times, does not have much substance.

The Pain Intensified:
Lily's trauma

After the soliloquies, the play resumes where it ended at intermission, with Lily, Michael, and Skinner still in the Guildhall waiting for the British troops outside to leave. In the second act the conversations between the three characters go deeper, and as they do, the men's colonization of Lily becomes more evident because the audience has already witnessed her moment of rupture. In a particularly poignant scene in the second act, Skinner presses Lily, challenging her to express why she marches. Because of her oppression Lily is unable to articulate her own reasons. Instead she claims the standard political reasons, whether or not they are her own.

> LILY. Wan man[4] – wan vote – that's what I want. You know – wan man – wan vote.
> SKINNER. You got that six months ago.
> LILY. Sure I know that. Sure I know we got it.
> SKINNER. That's not what you're marching for, then.
> LILY. Gerrymandering[5] – that's another thing – no more gerrymandering that's what I want – no more gerrymandering. And civil rights for everybody – that's what I want – you know – civil rights – that's why I march.
> SKINNER. I don't believe a word of it, Lily. (154)

After forcing Lily to admit her own ignorance, Skinner proceeds to speak for Lily, telling her why she marches, just as Michael had done earlier, although Skinner seems aware of exactly what he is doing. Tony Coult writes, "As [Skinner] does so, he probes beneath the

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[4] "One man, one vote" referred to the differences between Northern Ireland's and Britain's local government property qualifications. This was such a large issue because Northern Ireland used the business vote, which enabled some people to have up to six votes until 1969.
[5] Gerrymandering refers to the manipulation of boundaries in order to ensure that the Protestants maintained a higher number of seats in government than the Catholics.

layer of ideals and abstractions that Lily has expressed to what he sees as a deeper and more mundane truth" (51). Skinner says:

> I'll tell you why you march… Because you live with eleven kids and a sick husband in two rooms that aren't fit for animals. Because you exist on a state subsistence that's about enough to keep you alive but too small to fire your guts. Because you know your children are caught in the same morass. Because for the first time in your life you grumbled and someone else grumbled and someone else, and you heard each other, and became aware that there were hundreds, thousands, millions of us all over the world, and in a vague groping way you were outraged. That's what it's all about, Lily. (154)

As Skinner speaks for Lily, he acts as a colonizer, pushing her into deeper submission. But this moment is one of paradox, where Skinner does, for the first time, seem to understand Lily's predicament – her forcibly silenced role in society, and he uses the individual circumstances she has shared with Skinner in the play to articulate what he sees as her deepest hurt. However, as Skinner progresses through the monologue he changes pronouns, using Lily's circumstances to talk about his own frustration and grouping Lily in with him. "Because for the first time in your life *you* grumbled and someone else grumbled and someone else, and *you* heard each other, and became aware that there were hundreds, thousands, millions of *us* all over the world, and in a vague groping way you were outraged. That's what it's all about, Lily." The line is both oppressing and freeing for Lily, because Skinner articulates a truth about her pain-filled life. Her reaction shows the depth of her trauma. After Skinner's speech the stage directions read, "*Lily gazes at him. Pause*." Unable to articulate her thoughts to Skinner, Lily is finally silenced, left only to say, "I suppose you're right" (154), pointing to her recognition of her own silence. In light of the earlier soliloquies this moment is particularly noteworthy. After we have witnessed Lily's freedom from her constructed

identity, this moment emphasizes the power of the male oppressor. Lily gives in, affirming Skinner in his description of her and her life, and confirming his construction of her. As Skinner articulates what he believes to be true of Lily, he reduces her sense of what is meaningful in her life to a mere string of words that are not her own. This is a breaking point for Lily; she can no longer speak for herself because she believes what the men say about her.

After Lily relents to Skinner and gives in to his analysis of her life, he tries to change the subject and mood, to be more "flippant" as the stage directions read. Lily, however, does not follow his lead and maintains her somber attitude. Outside the moment of rupture this is the character's most serious moment in the play. Friel writes in this moment a character that is emotionally stuck in her role as colonized victim, for although Skinner tries desperately to lighten the mood, as he offers Lily a drink saying, "Let's walk into the future with bloodshot eyes and unsteady step" (155), Lily draws him back. In a move where Lily consciously expresses her political situation as a female, she tells Skinner of the patriarchal home in which she lives and the verbal abuse her husband employs to maintain power over her.

Lily then positions herself as an agent on behalf of someone even more marginalized than she: Lily tells Skinner of her son Declan for whom she marches. In this political act of reclaiming her role as mother, Lily discusses her son's disability and articulates his struggle as an outsider in the Irish community. As Lily marches for her son she stands up for those who, like herself, are silenced in the community.

> LILY. Did you ever hear tell of a mongol child, Skinner?
> SKINNER. Where did you hide the brandy?
> LILY. I told you a lie about Declan. That's what Declan is. He's not just

> shy, our Declan. He's a mongol. And it's for him I go on all the civil rights marches. Isn't that stupid? You and him [Michael] and everybody else marching and protesting about sensible things like politics and stuff and me in the middle of you all, marching for Declan. Isn't that the stupidest thing you ever heard? Sure I could march from here to Dublin and sure what good would it do Declan? Stupid and all as I am I know that much. But still I march – every Saturday. I still march. Isn't that the stupidest thing you ever hear? (155)

In an interesting moment of kindness Skinner responds, "no" (155). This simple line complicates Skinner's role in the play. Here Skinner recognizes Lily's trauma—her battle as a colonized woman. He witnesses her constructed identity and her new attempt—in response to his prodding—to reflect on her real motivations. Rather than reinforcing his right to speak for her, he begins to back down, allowing her to see her identity for what it is—a projection by the male colonizer in an effort to maintain control. Friel challenges the gender barrier he has written into these characters as he creates this moment of understanding. In this moment Lily perceives Skinner's gentleness and with extreme emotion she elaborates, saying, "That's what the chairman said when I – you know – when I tried to tell him what I was thinking. He never talks about him; can't even look at him. And that day that's what he said, 'You're a bone stupid bitch. No wonder the kid's bone stupid too.' The chairman – that's what he said" (155). In this line Friel writes for Lily a small, although important, realization. She understands her husband's abuse and power over her. As she relates the story to Skinner, the audience glimpses Lily understanding the depth of her own trauma, even though she may not be able to articulate it fully during the regular dialogue. For the first time, Lily discusses the way in which her husband has silenced her, and she talks about it with great sadness—a reminder of the

grief she discusses in her monologue. After a brief silence Lily ends the scene stating, "O merciful God" (155), a quiet cry for grace upon herself and her son.

A Scar Begins to Form:
a powerful truth spoken

In the last moments of the play, in a final act of strength, Lily speaks up to display her insight and wisdom. As the three prepare to leave the parlour, to walk out to their death, Lily and Skinner sign the guest book, making their mark in history. As Skinner finishes writing his name, Lily asks him what he wrote on the comments line. He quotes his act of final assertion in the Mayor's parlour, "Freeman of the city," to which Lily replies, "Sure that means nothing" (165). The power of this line arises because the audience has already witnessed Lily's soliloquy, and viewed the character hidden beneath the role that colonization has forced her to play. In such a small line Lily reveals the importance and irony of the whole play, reminding audiences of the crimes committed during both the Troubles and the present gender war, reflecting the title of the play.

The power of the play lies in Friel's ability to respond to the trauma both of Bloody Sunday and of the twice colonized female. *The Freedom of the City* asks the audience to realize a dangerous consequence of colonization, the desire of the colonized and emasculated native male to have power over another human being. Lily becomes a voice for women who are victims of not only the colonization of a nation, but also the inevitable consequences of that colonization, unyielding patriarchy. Friel's carefully placed soliloquies—the moment of rupture—give voice to the silenced narratives lost in trauma. The soliloquy guides Irish audiences into and through the traumas of their history, in an effort to heal those gaping wounds left by generations of colonization.

CHAPTER TWO

"SOMETHING IS BEING ERODED"[1]: THE SUBALTERN SPEAKS IN *TRANSLATATIONS*

> *Every generation uses language to build its own resonant past. … Without the true fiction of history, without the unbroken animation of a chosen past, we become flat shadows.*
>
> — *George Steiner*[2]

Brian Friel's 1980 play *Translations* uses the historical frame of the English Ordnance Survey and the theme of language to expose the traumatic effects of erased identity and national loss. These devices, highly visible and vitally important to the play and its message, have been given much attention in scholarly discussions. Less observed is the character Friel skillfully writes to represent and reflect these elements and their effects within the play. Both components (the historical frame and the theme of language) are embodied in the silent figure Sarah, who haunts the stage with her continuous presence. As the audience witnesses a widening crevasse through the loss of the Irish language and the effects of the English Ordnance Survey, so the character Sarah experiences the same erasure, her voice falling into the void. By examining Sarah and analyzing her story, audiences encounter the traumatic remnants of colonization. Friel uses Sarah as a dramatic device to stand in not only as the female subaltern but also as a reflection of Ireland itself. Sarah's presence and transformation throughout *Translations* serves to guide Irish audience members to and through the trauma of their past as they

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[1] Friel, Brian. *Translations*, pp. 420.
[2] *After Babel*, pp. 30.

witness Sarah's discovery of her silenced voice. Through Sarah, audiences find their stories played out in physical form. In addition Sarah's story articulates parallel traumas: that of the English Ordnance Survey and its effect on Irish language and that of the twice colonized female. Friel's characterization of these traumas encourages audiences to confront and embrace their own traumatic histories so that they might begin to heal the scars of oppression.

Ghost Story:
the premiere of *Translations* and the Field Day Company

On 23 September 1980 the premiere play of the newly formed company Field Day opened in the highly politicized space of Derry Guildhall, where eight years prior Bloody Sunday marchers intended to end their protest. The play was *Translations*, and its run received worldwide attention and acclaim. Friel's play tackles the effects of language and linguistic expression in a colonized society. In order to highlight these themes, Friel sets the play during the 1830s English Ordnance Survey when England remapped Ireland, asserting its power by renaming towns and eventually removing the Irish language from the country. This act distanced the Irish people from their rich history.

In 1979 Friel completed the play *Translations* and brought on board Irish actor Stephen Rae to be part of the production. Together Friel and Rae sought out a performance space in Derry and the funds necessary for staging. The Northern Ireland Arts Council agreed to fund the production only if Friel and Rae were members of an existing regional company. To this end, Friel and Rae formed the Field Day Company—its name derived from the two last names of the founding members, "Friel" and "Rae." The newly-formed regional company received £40,000 from the Northern Ireland Arts

Council in addition to another £10,000 from the Arts Council in the Republic of Ireland, giving the pair the funds needed to produce what would become known as Friel's most famous anti-colonist play. Aided by the legitimacy of their new professional company, Friel and Rae found a space for their play: the Guildhall, the local seat of colonial government in Derry. Soon after the formation of Field Day, five artists from Northern Ireland joined Friel and Rae: poet Seamus Heaney; literary critics Tom Paulin, Seamus Deane, and (later) Thomas Kilroy; and musician David Hammond. Hammond, in particular, stepped on board because of Field Day's commitment both as a theatre company and as a cultural company, to "put on plays outside the confines of the established theatre, and through that, to begin to effect a change in the apathetic atmosphere of the North" (Deane 20). Although some argued that the Field Day project depends on political unification, Friel counters that saying "I don't think it should be read in those terms. I think it should lead to a cultural state, not a political state. And I think out of that cultural state, a possibility of a political state follows" (Murray *Brian Friel Essays, Diaries, Interviews* 113). The company, in Friel's vision, would also create "a fifth province to which artistic and cultural loyalty [could] be offered" (O'Toole 21). The mythical fifth province would be an expansion from the four actual provinces of Ireland – an imagined space that would stretch beyond political borders and biases.

The Field Day Company established itself as a reputable organization and quickly made monumental changes in the Irish literary landscape with its theatre productions, literary contributions, and its five-book anthology consisting of plays, poems, and essays on the topic on Ireland and Irish politics. Known to some as a "ten-year-old dramatic experiment," (Roche 11) the Derry based Field Day Company provided the Irish

repertoire with over ten new plays, five by Friel including three originals and two adaptations.

Translations proved the ideal play with which to open the Field Day Company, introducing the company as an experimental theatre group that would wrestle with the politics and injustices engrained in Ireland's oppressive history. Focusing on a small Irish community held together by a school at which the characters study, "*Translations* opens with a glimpse of a linguistic Eden, an Irish-speaking Ireland before the Ordnance Survey" (Lee 172). The play is set in an Irish-speaking community in a hedge-school in the fictional village "Baile Beag/Ballybeg" (Friel 380)[3] Ireland in August 1833. The double spelling of the town in the stage directions at the beginning of the play (and, therefore, the notes in the program) foreshadows the events of the play and the removal of the Irish language. Although pronounced the same, for the majority of the play Friel not so subtly asserts his own heritage in the text by exclusively calling the town by its Irish name and not its anglicized name.

The setting of the hedge school provides a historically accurate addition to the play.

> Hedge School: under the penal laws in the 17th century, a Catholic or Gaelic-language education was outlawed in Ireland. In defiance, Irish people set up mobile, secret schools which were initially in hedgerows with a look-out nearby to warn of English officials or soldiers. (Brannigan 12)

The play focuses on the O'Donnell family comprised of father Hugh, linguistic professor and headmaster of the hedge school; eldest son Manus, also a scholar who occasionally

[3] Interestingly, *Dancing at Lughnasa* is set just outside of the same town, but in his stage directions Friel uses the anglicized word saying, "*The home of the Mundy family, two miles outside the village of Ballybeg, County Donegal, Ireland*" (3). In doing so Friel, in his own way, comments on the erasure of the Irish spelling as *Dancing at Lughnasa* takes place in 1936 after the remapping has occurred.

fills in for his father as teacher; and son Owen, the prodigal figure who returns home to be a translator for the British Army, serving Captain Lancey and Lieutenant Yolland. In a telling line Owen describes his job to his fellow Irishmen saying, “I’m employed as a part-time, underpaid, civilian interpreter. My job is to translate the quaint, archaic tongue you people persist in speaking into the King’s good English” (404). Here Owen betrays his own countrymen and family as he subscribes to the opinion of his British employers.

In the play several British military officers come into Baile Beag to work on the survey. While there, Yolland, one of the officers, falls in love with an Irish woman. A love triangle ensues and ends in tragedy when Yolland disappears, angering his British commanders, devastating his lover, and casting suspicion on the spurned Irishman. The play ends with farms and livestock burning in the distance in “retaliation” for the disappearance of the British officer. The other characters in the play are students of the Hedge School; they include the mute Sarah; Maire, Manus and Yolland’s love interest; Jimmy Jack, an elderly student who is fascinated by the Greek classics; Bridget, a young gossipy girl; and Doalty, whose interests, like Bridget’s, lie outside the classroom.

Through these characters and their story, the play confronts the historical moment of the English Ordnance Survey and via theatricality asks the audience to address this traumatic period in Ireland’s past when the removal of the Irish language strengthened the British Empire’s chokehold on the Irish people. In its plot, structure, and thematic elements, the play emphasizes the “relations between language, politics, and history” (McGrath 541). In *Translations* the theatre space, like the fifth province, functions as neutral territory where Irish individuals wrestle with the remnants of one of the most oppressive moments in their past to move towards healing.

Although *Translations* takes place in a pre-partition era when the island of Ireland was not separated into the two countries it is today, Friel wrote it at a time of political unrest towards the end of one of the most violent periods during the Northern Irish Troubles. Stakes were high for the Irish Catholic populations. In 1980, the year the play premiered, Bobby Sands, along with others, conducted hunger strikes in a Belfast prison to protest against unfair treatment of political prisoners in the North. These protests, combined with a decade of bombings, shootings, and the highest death tolls of the Troubles, made 1980 a particularly poignant year to produce a play about Ireland's history of oppression. Despite the chaos in the North, or perhaps because of it, Friel and the Field Day Company decided to premiere the play in Derry—a city that had been a central location for the Northern Irish Troubles, including the tragedy of Bloody Sunday only eight years prior. A review from the first production of *Translations* observes, "The conflict postulated by Mr. Friel still exists, unresolved. The scene … has a peculiar relevance to community divisions that exist today. The point was not missed by Derry audiences" (Rushe, "Derry *Translations*" 556). The play was a huge success critically and artistically, igniting conversation concerning the historical lead-up to the violent Northern Irish Troubles. This ensuing dialogue not only confirmed Field Day's opinion that theatre could be a space for discussion of Irish politics and reconciliation, but also demonstrated the ability of a play to heal the wounds left by a trauma largely ignored in Irish theatre. Friel's play succeeded both because of its production values and because of Friel's ability to help guide his audiences to and through the traumas of the English Ordnance Survey and the twice-oppressed Irish female. In *Translations* Friel gives voice

to the narratives lost by having his characters speak from the crevasse caused by the traumas.

When *Translations* opened in Derry the Field Day Company brought the marginalized town back onto the world's stage as a cultural space. Prior to the opening, a professional play had not been produced in Derry for nearly two hundred years. Producing the play in the Guildhall did not go unnoticed as a nod to the political upheaval that had occurred there during Bloody Sunday. Although Bloody Sunday occurred almost a decade before *Translations* premiered, the Guildhall still echoed with unionist control in Derry. But even with the Catholic perspective trickling into the text and the production, Protestant audiences found the play captivating; the Protestant Mayor of Derry gave a standing ovation on opening night (Morash 240). The play transcended political boundaries, reaching into the "fifth province." That its audiences followed is a tribute to Friel's ability to bring awareness and new understanding to historical wounds.

For the next decade the play toured the world: first in Ireland and then to London where it played at both the Hampstead and the National Theatre as "the first Irish play to enter their repertoire since O'Casey" (Roche 3). From there it moved around the globe, continuing to stun audiences with its subtle political hints and powerful characters. Despite its popularity abroad, the play focuses on the Irish narrative, and Friel's ideal audience is undoubtedly the Irish whose traumatic history is being played out before them. While global audiences certainly enjoy the play and find power in its anti-colonist message, the underlying goal of the text—to bring about healing to generations of traumatized Irish citizens—is reserved for the Irish audiences who witness it.

The theme of language is immersed in every aspect of the play and shows itself in many forms—through plot, characterizations, and clever theatrical techniques. Friel's awareness of the power of language, particularly for Irish audiences, heightens the theatrics of the play. The play suggests that language is "a double-edged weapon" (Roche 217), and Friel delicately grasps the weapon to use it to its full extent. But it is not only language that plays a dominant role in the text; the act of translation is at the crux of the play and Friel's strength as a playwright is revealed as he wrestles with this problematic colonialist tool.

While the play certainly addresses the trauma of the English Ordnance Survey and the problems inherent to translation, there is another element in the play begging exploration. Sarah embodies these elements while simultaneously standing as a representation of the dually colonized female. Although a highly symbolic character (a mute who literally lacks linguistic expression), Sarah is rarely discussed in scholarly circles. In most discussions Sarah stands secondary to the female character Maire, the love interest of both the British soldier Yolland and the Irishman Manus. But it is Sarah who has the more compelling story, and it is *in* Sarah that Friel locates both the trauma of the female and the trauma of the nation expressed through her inability to communicate, her interactions with the male characters onstage, and her complex moment of rupture that, although not part of the script, has drastic effects on the lives of the Irish community and alters the outcome of the play. In order to fully appreciate Sarah's reflection of the themes of the English Ordnance Survey and the erasure of Irish language, I will first briefly explore the historical context of the survey and Friel's theatrical tension between the English and Irish languages within the play. Armed with a knowledge of these

elements, an in-depth analysis of Sarah's story will reveal Friel's desire to heal his audiences of the traumas caused by the oppression of both nation and female.

X Marks the Spot:
the burial of the Irish identity

"The most disagreeable part of the three kingdoms in Ireland,

and therefore Ireland has a splendid map."

—Lord Salisbury, 1883[4]

Beginning in the 1760s the British government created a board to "make *ad hoc* surveys of areas of military importance" (J. H. Andrews 1 his emphasis). This survey consisted of the creation of maps, through which the English could maintain a solid understanding of the Irish landscape beyond their western border. It also involved the renaming of Irish locations with English place names. The survey quickly became a means to further oppress the Irish as it removed their primary language from the official documents of the island.

Thomas Colby, an expert in trigonomical surveying, headed up the Irish survey. He firmly believed that Ireland needed a survey, and that it would reveal aspects of Ireland that the British had not known: "In any country, as far as Colby was concerned, the ordnance knew best" (J. H. Andrews 20 – 21). In 1824 the Ordnance Survey began under Colby's leadership and with the blessing of the Marquis Wellesley who, like many others, believed that it was up to England to conduct a complete and error-proof survey of the Irish landscape. Wellesley said that the proposed survey "cannot be executed by Irish engineers and Irish agents of any description. Neither science, nor skill, nor diligence, nor

[4] qtd. in J. H. Andrews, *A Paper Landscape*, pp. iii.

discipline, nor integrity sufficient for such a work can be found in Ireland" (qtd. in J. H. Andrews 21), an idea that was widely shared in England and one that embodied Anglo/Irish relations at the time. This unfounded attitude about the lack of intelligence had an undeniably negative effect on how the survey was received in Ireland, an attitude Friel points towards in *Translations*. In one scene the Irish characters communicate in Latin in front of a British Captain who mistakenly assumes they are speaking the Irish language. The almost comedic scene occurs when, upon hearing Jimmy Jack say in Latin, "*Nonne Latine loquitur*?" or "Does he not speak Latin?" British Captain Lancey replies "I do not speak Gaelic, sir" (405). This short exchange implies a hierarchy of languages; if English is "more educated" than Irish, certainly Latin (a dead language) is even more educated than English. But Lancey, in his ignorance, does not even recognize the Latin phrase much less understand it. Here Friel points to the British arrogance at play during the English Ordnance Survey while simultaneously reinforcing the rich and educated history of Ireland.

According to the British government, the English Ordnance Survey set out to create new maps of Ireland, which were to be more precise because the English used a 6-inch per mile scale. The new maps affected an official erasure of the Irish language. This elimination arose because the old Irish maps listed the towns' names (rightfully) in Irish, a language hard to learn, difficult to pronounce without a solid understanding of Irish, and foreign to the English. The English, therefore, set out to rename the towns for the map either by respelling them based on phonetics (Baile Beg becomes Ballybeg), translating them, or altering them completely.

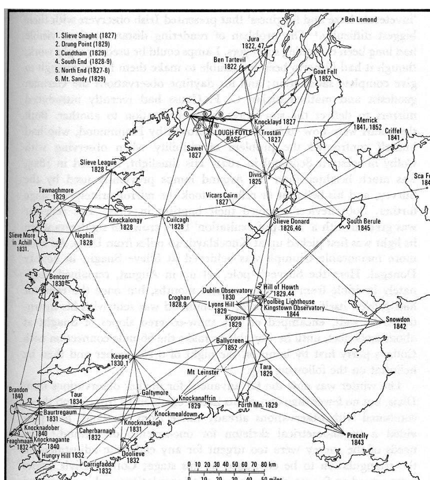

Fig. 3.1 The principal triangulation of Ireland. A.R. Clarke, 1858; rpt. in John Hayward Andrews, *A Paper Landscape* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2002) 41.

Because of the need to translate the names from Irish to English, in the early years of mapping,

> the military contribution to Irish cartography was a minor one. It was the civilian surveyors, working on an *ad hoc* basis in the intervals left by their private practices, who provided most of the maps that were needed for public service, whether local or national. (J. H. Andrews 4, his emphasis)

Friel writes this historical detail into his play. The characters that work together to create a map of the area surrounding Baile Beag are not only the British Lieutenant Yolland, but also the Irish Owen O'Donnell, who returns home for this very project. This collaboration establishes the idea of betrayal in *Translations*, as the Irishman works alongside his own colonizer to erase the identity of his home.

Friel's play then turns to a discussion of the effects of this survey on the Irish culture: "What Friel captures in *Translations* is a critical passage in Ireland's history when the last remnants of a living Gaelic culture are about to become Anglicized" (McGrath 541). A secondary effect of the mapping was the erasure of Irish history. Prior

to the survey, “Irish maps have their own history: and since this was an age of national expansion, both real and proposed, it is a history full of interest and incident” (J. H. Andrews 3). The new maps were without history as names of towns suddenly lost their identity. In the play, Friel’s audience members witness the trauma created by the survey as they watch the disintegration of their own Irish language and a removal of their own Irish history while their towns are renamed. Language becomes a driving force of the play, and audiences are asked to re-imagine the traumatic event that defined the Irish country.

Whispers from the Grave:
Friel’s use of the “dead” language in *Translations*

Translations suggests that the trauma of the Ordnance Survey arose not out of the mapping of the island but out of the desecration of the Irish language. This theme of language is at the center of *Translations*. Language itself defines all of the main characters in one form or another.

The theme of language and its personification in these characters is not new to Friel’s work, nor is it isolated to only a few of his pieces; rather, it permeates his body of work. Coult says of *Dancing at Lughnasa* (a play that will be explored in detail in the following chapter) that “[w]e are taken back to a layer of the play – and to a theme – that runs like a constant, turbulent river through all of Friel’s work: the insecurity of language and its power to define experience” (108). However, while the theme of language, and its power, appears in of many of Friel’s plays, it is given an upfront role in *Translations* so that the audience cannot walk away from the play without being struck by the power of

language and its ability to define us. Deane describes Friel's commanding use of this theme saying:

> It is not surprising that his drama evolves, with increasing sureness, towards an analysis of the behaviour of language itself and, particularly, of the ways in which that behaviour, so ostensibly in the power of the individual, is fundamentally dictated by historical circumstances. (13)

Friel utilizes the power of language in his poetic phrasing throughout his play, empowering his figures and speaking to the incredible strength of language and its role in defining a nation and a people.

In a memorable scene between Irishman Owen and the British Lieutenant Yolland the audience is given a glimpse of how the erasure of the Irish language may have taken place. The scene depicts the two characters working together to rename the island. The job is tedious, requiring them to rename each individual city, translating the name to the English equivalent. In the midst of the renaming, the two struggle to comprehend what exactly is the extent of their job:

> OWEN. Bun na hAbhann.
> YOLLAND. Bun na Abbann.
> OWEN. That's better. Bun is the Irish word for bottom. And Abha means river. So it's literally the mouth of the river.
> YOLLAND. Let's leave it alone. There's no English equivalent for a sound like that.
> OWEN. What is it called in the church registry?
> YOLLAND. Let's see … Banowen.
> OWEN. That's wrong. (*Consults text.*) The list of freeholders calls it Owenmore – that's completely wrong: Owenmore's the big river at the west end of the parish. (*Another text*.) And in the grand jury lists it's called – God! – Binhone! – wherever they got that. I suppose we could Anglicize it to Bunowen; but somehow that's neither fish nor flesh.
> YOLLAND. I give up.
> OWEN. (*At map*) Back to first principles. What are we trying to do?
> YOLLAND. Good question.
> OWEN. We are trying to denominate and at the same time describe that tiny area of soggy, rocky, sandy ground where that little stream enters

> the sea, an area known locally as Bun na hAbhann … Burnfoot! What about Burnfoot?
> YOLLAND. Good … Burnfoot's good. (410)

As Owen and Yolland struggle with translating and renaming the cities, two attitudes are being expressed. The scene suggests a lack of respect for both the name and the town. While Bun na hAbhann means "the mouth of the river," by the end of the scene Owen describes the land as "an area of soggy, rocky, sandy ground where that little stream enters the sea," a description which demonstrates the a flippancy towards the land and its history. The renaming, to Burnfoot, also entirely obliterates the meaning of Bun na hAbhann, bringing with it instead a negative connotation to a landscape whose original name was quite appealing and poetic. Throughout the scene, the audience witnesses the slow desecration of the Irish landscape as the Irish language is stripped from it.

This scene addresses a question Caruth asks about representing trauma. She writes, "The possibility of knowing history … is thus also raised as a deeply ethical dilemma: the unremitting problem of *how not to betray the past*" (27). Friel responds to this question by relating the historical account in the only way that Caruth suggests is feasible: via fiction. This approach "…explores the possibility of a faithful history in the very indirectness of this telling" (Caruth 27). Friel avoids repeating the trauma by *representing* the painful history without simply *re-presenting* it. He avoids this re-presentation by writing a fictional account of a truthful scenario. Interestingly, Friel includes a bit of comedy into the scene as Owen and Yolland struggle to find the new name for the town. This comedy, for its part, aids Friel in his goal to avoid a simple repetition of the trauma. But the trauma certainly looms in the scene, as the exchange stands in for the larger mapping process.

The fictional version of the historical account emphasizes the depth of the trauma experienced by the Irish people in the removal of their language. The trauma involves destruction not only of the past, but also of the future. Headmaster Hugh articulates this trauma to Yolland in a powerful scene describing precisely what will be lost in renaming the island:

> Yes, it is a rich language, Lieutenant, full of mythologies of fantasy and hope and self-deception – a syntax opulent with tomorrows. It is our response to mud cabins and a diet of potatoes; our only method of replying to … inevitabilities. (Friel 418 – 19)

This poetic description of the Irish language lies at the center of the play's argument while simultaneously speaking of the language that contemporary Ireland is trying desperately to hold onto. Hugh's line suggests that as the lyricism of the Irish names is replaced with nonsensical words, these mythical or fantastical names are removed, leaving in their place only the "mud cabins" and "potatoes."

Yet, only lines after his beautiful description of the Irish language, Hugh cautions Yolland (and the audience) about the sacredness and mortality of language saying:

> But remember that words are signals, counters. They are not immortal. And it can happen – to use an image you'll understand – it can happen that a civilization can be imprisoned in a linguistic contour which no longer matches the landscape of … fact. (419)

Here Hugh speaks of the traumatic erasure of the Irish language. The line describes exactly what occurred in the renaming scene between Yolland and Owen: that language no longer matches the fact (i.e. Burnfoot does not describe Bun na hAbhann). Friel allows audiences to see the more generalized forms of that specific example, that the language handed to the Irish by England does not fit either the literal landscape or the broader "landscape of fact." He speaks not only to Yolland, but to the ideal audience – an

audience whose members have been inevitably defined by the imprisonment of the Irish civilization. Hugh speaks from and to the present audience, relaying truth of the linguistic trauma that forever altered the Irish landscape.

Translations is itself an exercise in language. Despite the fact that a majority of the main characters are meant to be speaking Irish, Friel has the actors speak English. This choice not only allows the play to reach a wider audience but is also an overt political statement about the erasure of the Irish language. In addition to the Irish characters, Friel includes English characters who, naturally, speak English. The audience then comes to the realization that although all the *actors* are speaking English, the *characters* cannot understand one another. Friel described this device in his journal saying, "The people from Urris/Ballybeg would have been Irish-speaking in 1833 – so a theatrical conceit will have to be devised by which even though the actors speak English – the audience will assume or accept that they are speaking Irish. Could that work?" (Coult 87). Yes, it does! In utilizing this particular "theatrical conceit," Friel heightens and highlights the theme of language, so that the audience begins to question language itself in a most interesting way. Scholar F. C. McGrath writes about this device saying:

> With its experimental representation of Irish in English, *Translations* itself renews an image of Irish history … at the point when the old Gaelic culture was being translated (as Friel was translating in) into another language. (542)

Language and history are woven together through the medium of Friel's play. This technique moves the audience towards the historical moment under observation and allows them to ponder the residual effect of the Anglicization of Ireland.

Haunting Presence:
Sarah as the ultimate subaltern

Translations is fundamentally about language and communication, and Friel highlights these themes through a character's *lack* of language. The character Sarah embodies the removal of the Irish identity while simultaneously emphasizing the loss of the female identity in her increasingly colonized society. Throughout the play this silent figure seeks a means to express herself to the Irish male, Manus, whom she loves. As the play progresses and the British assert more power over the Irish, Sarah slips farther into her silence and becomes a physical expression of the erasure occurring both in her body and to the national Irish identity. Silence is not an altogether new technique used in post-colonial theatre: "Post-colonial plays generally refuse to limit their characters to positions of linguistic marginality; instead, most dismantle such positions, even by means of the apparently non-communicative language of silence" (Gilbert and Tompkins 190). Friel employs the language of silence in *Translations* through Sarah, the mute figure. Sarah stands out in the play as the silent subaltern; as a mute, she is deprived of linguistic expression, and her silence becomes a visible reminder of the female's twice colonized status. Friel describes her in a stage direction:

> *SARAH's speech defect is so bad that all her life she has been considered locally to be dumb and she has accepted this: when she wishes to communicate, she grunts and makes unintelligible nasal sounds. She has a waiflike appearance and could be any age from seventeen to thirty-five. (383)*

Sarah's form of communication as described in Friel's stage directions is through animalistic grunts: "Without language, capable only of inarticulate and unintelligible sounds, Sarah is scarcely distinguishable from the dumb beasts of the field" (Roche 246).

But Friel's stage directions speak of more than just Sarah's silence and introduce her as someone above the "dumb beasts of the field." Friel writes that Sarah is "*considered* locally to be dumb," not that she *is* dumb; and, even more importantly, Sarah accepts this assertion. These stage directions are a signal for actors who embody this role and directors of the productions to take note of the oppression that claims Sarah in her isolated state. Throughout the play, however, Friel's stage directions reveal that Sarah is *not* intellectually dumb, and she is constantly aware and reacting to the scenes in front of her. She is, in fact, the character who has the *most* knowledge of her surroundings. But stuck in her oppression, Sarah is unable to communicate her knowledge to the other figures.

The stage directions also assert the timelessness of the character. Friel writes that she "could be any age from seventeen to thirty-five." This wide range of age (not given to any of the other characters in the play) speaks to Sarah's role as a representation of what is occurring in the Irish community at the time. Just as Sarah herself transcends age, so do the Irish names whose histories precede the play's timeline.

Spivak describes the subaltern figure that emerges under imperialist rule and asks, "*can the subaltern speak*?" (25 her emphasis). By writing the silent figure, Friel responds to Spivak's question by asking audiences to consider a different question: "*Will* the subaltern speak?" As Sarah haunts the play with her looming presence the audience must ask themselves this very question. It is not that the subaltern cannot speak; it is that she does not. Throughout the play she grunts or mimes to express her individual ideas. But Sarah also is taught to speak the words "My name is Sarah," by an Irishman. This memorized phrase of identification becomes a repeated gesture of her trauma. These

words then are memorized mimicry of her colonizer and not yet the speech of the liberated subaltern.

The audience witnesses this mimicry effect in the first few moments of the play, when Sarah is being taught to speak by Manus, a physically impaired scholar. Because of his impairment and his colonized status Manus is similarly dually oppressed, yet he asserts his power over the literally silenced female—a figure therefore not only twice colonized, but thrice as a female Irish mute. The play opens with Manus teaching Sarah to speak the words, “My name is Sarah” (Friel 384). The male is teaching the female her identity, trying to make up for his own lack of “completeness.” The importance of the line arises not only out of the intention but out of its phrasing. Had the line only been intended to emphasize the loss of identity it could have been written, “I am Sarah.” However, Friel, ever careful with his choice of words, writes, “My *name* is Sarah.” This gesture is “the first act of naming in a play obsessed with the theme and [also] a crucial step in Sarah’s sense of her own identity” (Roche 246). By having the line read, “My name is Sarah,” Friel transposes the idea of naming, and therefore remapping, onto the character itself. In this four-word line Friel asks his audience to pay attention to the character of Sarah, as her journey will inevitably reflect the journey of Ireland itself.

In the opening scene Manus holds Sarah’s hands and speaks directly into her face saying, “Get your tongue and your lips working. ‘My name—.’ Come on. One more try. ‘My name is—.’ Good girl” (Friel 384). Here, Manus condescendingly calls her “good girl,” a phrase one might hear from a parent trying to teach a child to eat food off a plate, suggesting that Manus views Sarah as an infantile being. In this line Manus shows that he cannot look beyond Sarah’s disability or her gender, to interact with her as a peer. In

Manus's eyes, Sarah is not the woman she should be, but rather, a "good girl," who requires this praise from her teacher. The relationship between the two characters not only expresses the patriarchal relationship within the colonized society, but also reflects the national colonial relationship between England and Ireland as well. Manus's egotistical assertion of power is reminiscent of the condescending encounters of the British with the Irish during the English Ordnance Survey.

At the end of the scene, Sarah finally says the phrase "My name is Sarah." Once she regurgitates the phrase that Manus has been (not so patiently) waiting to hear, he exclaims:

> Marvellous! Bloody marvelous!
> (*Manus hugs Sarah. She smiles in shy, embarrassed pleasure.*)
> Did you hear that, Jimmy? – 'My name is Sarah' – clear as a bell.
> (*To Sarah*) The Infant Prodigy doesn't know what we're up at.
> (*Sarah laughs at this*. *Manus hugs her again and stands up*.)
> Now we're really started! Nothing'll stop us now! Nothing in the wide world! (385)

Scholars have argued that this scene expresses optimism, beginning the play on a light tone: "Sarah's success… open[s] the play on a note of hope" (Lee 173). I, however, argue that the scene is anything but hopeful. Rather it foreshadows the oppression of the Irish by the British and reminds audiences of the male-over-female colonization within their own country. Even though it is Sarah who succeeds in saying "My name is Sarah," Manus points out that Sarah's "accomplishment" is due to his work; they are a team, with Sarah as team member and Manus as coach. This is evidenced by his repeated use of the word "we," not "you." He states, "The Infant Prodigy doesn't know what *we're* up at. Now *we're* really started! Nothing'll stop *us* now!" Manus finishes the scene saying, "Soon you'll be telling me all the secrets that have been in that head of yours all these

years" (385). Although Manus is genuinely excited for Sarah, he still treats her as though she is beneath him, following the trend that Spivak lays out in her article, that the male keeps the female in her subaltern position: "It is … both as subject of colonialist historiography and as subject of insurgency, the ideological construction of gender that keeps the male dominant" (28). The opening scene between Manus and Sarah exposes this male-dominant construction of gender. Although the play might seem solely focused on national colonization, Friel begins the play by pointing out the gender divide and hierarchy present within the characters' own world.

But the scene also speaks of erasure, as Sarah's own identity is lost to the naming taught to her by her oppressor. This opening scene mirrors the erasure occurring in and to the Irish community as Sarah's loss embodies the loss of the Irish language. In the opening scene, Manus subjugates Sarah in precisely the same manner as the British who oppress his country. A later scene between Yolland and Owen expresses a similar trend of oppression but on a national scale. However, in this scene, unlike the opening scene with Manus and Sarah, Yolland and Owen express a sense of moral responsibility—a responsibility not felt by Manus in the first scene of the play. In the scene between Yolland and Owen, Yolland seems to grasp the depth and truth of what is occurring as he wrestles with his role in the erasure of the Irish language.

> OWEN. What is happening?
> YOLLAND. I'm not sure. But I'm concerned about my part in it. It's an eviction of sorts.
> OWEN. We're making a six-inch map of the country. Is there something sinister in that?
> YOLLAND. Not in –
> OWEN. And we're taking place-names that are riddled with confusion and –
> YOLLAND. Who's confused? Are the people confused?

> OWEN. - and we're standardizing those names as accurately and as sensitively as we can.
> YOLLAND. Something is being eroded. (419 – 20)

Although Yolland cannot name it, the erosion he describes did actually occur in the metaphorical Irish landscape. And though he does not say it, Yolland suggests that the British may have recognized that there would be repercussions from the traumatic loss of voices, narratives, and names that were literally being lost as the British government anglicized the names of Irish towns and other topographic locations. Within the play, Friel expertly reflects this national trauma in Sarah's loss of identity as she learns to express herself only through a memorized phrase taught to her by someone else.

Sarah, interestingly, has the most stage time of any of the characters even though she has the fewest lines in the play. She haunts the scenes—a physical reminder of the lost narratives and the silence that will infect the whole town and country as language is taken from the Irish. Although she has been onstage since the beginning of the play, it is not until end of Act One that Sarah speaks again. Owen, Manus's brother, has entered the school and is about to introduce Captain Lancey and Lieutenant Yolland, but on his way out he looks over and sees Sarah, whom he does not recognize:

> OWEN. That's a new face. Who are you?
> (*A very brief hesitation. Then: –*)
> SARAH. My name is Sarah. (403)

In an eerie, fascinating moment, the audience hears Sarah repeat the words Manus taught her to say at the beginning of the play. In this brief exchange it becomes clear that Sarah does not know how to define herself, or identify herself, outside of Manus's controlled identification of her. Here we witness a colonial relationship between Sarah and Manus. Fanon writes of the colonial situation, "The native is being hemmed in… The first thing

the native learns is to stay in his place, and not to go beyond certain limits" (52). Just as the towns are now defined by the English names given to them, so Sarah is defined by the name provided to her by Manus. Sarah's limits are those that Manus teaches her, and, as this scene indicates, Sarah has learned to stay within them. But despite this form of oppression, Sarah still looks towards Manus for praise. After saying her mimicked phrase, she turns to Manus and "*very elated at her success*" (Friel 403) remarkably speaks outside her memorized phrase saying, "I said it, Manus!" But the stage directions indicate that, "*Manus ignores Sarah*" (404). By ignoring Sarah's articulation of her own ideas but praising her for mimicking the phrase he taught her, Manus exerts his power, emphasizing his grip on her. Fanon articulates that "the settler keeps alive in the native an anger which he deprives of outlet; the native is trapped in the tight links of the chains of colonialism" (54). By refusing Sarah adoration in the midst of others, but praising her in private, Manus maintains a hold on Sarah—trapping her with the bars of gendered colonization.

In writing Manus in this manner, Friel emphasizes how a "native" might act out of anger because of the ridicule and oppression he has received as the colonized. Manus is not only an Irish male, but a partially disabled Irish male whose brother returns home with British patriots who immediately stake a claim over Manus and his beloved country. In the same scene when Manus ignores Sarah, Owen exerts the colonial power in the schoolhouse saying:

> OWEN. Two friends of mine are waiting outside the door. … The older man is Captain Lancey. … He's the cartographer in charge of this whole area. … And the younger man that I traveled with from Dublin, his name is Lieutenant Yolland and he is attached to the toponymic department….
> HUGH. He gives names to places.

> OWEN. Indeed – although he is in fact an orthographer.
> MANUS. The correct spelling of those names. (403)

As evidenced by Hugh and Manus's response to Owen, the two school-masters recognize the erasure that is to take place. Owen is part of this erasure, and Manus is forced into submission as he waits for an imperialist force to take its place over him—just as he has done with Sarah.

The two scenes mentioned above are the only moments in the first half of the play where Sarah is mentioned in the script. Her only communication up to this point has been her repetition of the words "My name is Sarah," the phrase she speaks through mimicry, and her outburst of "I said it!" which was outright ignored by those around her. Otherwise, she has yet to speak and can only grunt or make motions to express herself—all within her boundaries as the "dumb" Irish woman: "When reading the play it is easy to forget that Sarah is there. However, her silent witness is an important factor to remember – she sees and hears everything" (Jones 81). Sarah's silent witness is exemplified when she observes the love scene between the Irish Maire (whom Manus loves) and British Lieutenant Yolland—the love scene that leads to Sarah's moment of rupture in the play.

Re-birth and Restoration:
Sarah's Moment of Rupture

The famous love scene of *Translations*, witnessed by the ghostly Sarah, provides the definitive example of Friel's unique theatrical device of English (Irish) speech. "As they reach out to each other from their linguistically separate worlds, the play's most important theatrical device – that characters speaking English are accepted by the audience as speaking Irish – is at its most self exposed" (Morash 239). The scene

suggests that while language has its limit, some emotions can traverse a language barrier and be expressed. The writing is very precise, both in the spoken lines and the stage directions; theatre scholar Nesta Jones describes Friel's writing in this play saying: "movement and stillness, language and silence combine to create a rhythm and image in which actors and audiences share an imaginative space" (Jones 99). The scene begins as if there were no language divide between Maire and Yolland; the lines are written as though the characters were speaking naturally to one another:

> MAIRE. O my God, that leap across the ditch nearly killed me
> YOLLAND. I could scarcely keep up with you. (Friel 426)

As the characters speak back and forth the audience nearly forgets that the two are "speaking" different languages. But Friel quickly reminds us of the characters' struggle with communication. At times Maire and Yolland are saying the same words, yet Friel cleverly writes the conversation to point out that the two are simply unable to communicate to one another:

> MAIRE. The grass must be wet. My feet are soaking.
> YOLLAND. Your feet must be wet. The grass is soaking.
> (*Another pause. Another few paces apart. They are now a long distance from one another.*) (426)

The audience enjoys the comedy in these lines, but the words highlight the barriers of language so that even when Maire and Yolland have the same thoughts they simply are unable to communicate, a fact that Friel points out in his stage directions, "They are now a long distance from one another." The distance between the characters is reminiscent of a widening metaphorical crevasse caused by the British presence (represented in Yolland) in Ireland.

With the characters standing apart, literally distanced from one another, Friel uses language to highlight the foreignness of the two characters, and the scene becomes a dance between them as they try desperately to communicate. After much frustration the two return to the earthly elements surrounding them and find they can communicate, but only using basic words—the ones Maire knows in English:

> MAIRE. … George – water.
> YOLLAND. 'Water'? Water! Oh yes – water – water – very good – water – good – good.
> MAIRE. Fire.
> YOLLAND. Fire – indeed – wonderful – fire, fire, fire – splendid – splendid!
> MAIRE. Ah … ah …
> YOLLAND. Yes? Go on.
> MAIRE. Earth.
> YOLLAND. 'Earth'?
> MAIRE. Earth. Earth.
> (*Yolland still does not understand. Maire stoops down and picks up a handful of clay. Holding it out.*) Earth.
> YOLLAND. Earth! Of course – earth! Earth. Earth. … (427-28)

In an almost embarrassing display of mis-communication, Friel uses this elemental conversation to reveal the tragedy of the inability to communicate. The scene painfully depicts the frustration that Sarah encounters daily (and that soon the Irish community will wrestle with) in which language and words are unknowable.

Friel highlights the sorrow accompanied with the loss of language when finally the lovers are able to "communicate" and express their love only through the rapidly disappearing Irish language. Here Yolland realizes that he knows Irish words—the names of the towns. Using these words, the two begin a melodic duet where they seem to move beyond language to express their love for one another:

YOLLAND. Bun na hAbhann? (*He says the name softly, almost privately, very tentatively, as if he were searching for a sound she might respond to. He tries again.*)
Druim Dubh?
(*Maire stops. She is listening. Yolland is encouraged.*)
Poll na gCaorach. Lis Maol.
(*Maire turns toward him.*)
Lis na nGall.
MAIRE. Lis na nGradh.
(*They are now facing each other and begin moving – almost imperceptibly – towards one another.*)
MAIRE. Carraig an Phoill.
YOLLAND. Carraig na Ri. Loch na nEan.
MAIRE. Lock an Iubhair. Machaire Buidhe.
YOLLAND. Machaire Mor. Cnoc na Mona.
MAIRE. Cnoc na NGabhar.
YOLLAND. Mullach.
MAIRE. Port.
YOLLAND. Tor.
MAIRE. Lag. (428-429)

Here, Friel provides the audience with a melodic encounter, which plays almost as a funeral dirge because of the disappearance of the words the characters use to communicate. This communication comes via Irish names that will be forgotten—lost to their British replacements; the harsh reality, though, is that this erasure comes by the hand of Yolland himself as he renames and remaps the island.

After Maire and Yolland use the Irish names of the towns to express their love, they begin to communicate in an inexplicable way that transcends language:

YOLLAND. I would tell you …
MAIRE. Don't stop – I know what you're saying.
YOLLAND. I would tell you how I want to be here – to live here – always – with you – always, always.
MAIRE. 'Always'? What is that word – 'always'?
YOLLAND. Yes-yes; always.
MAIRE. You're trembling.
YOLLAND. Yes, I'm trembling because of you.
MAIRE. I'm trembling, too. (429 – 30)

Following this moment the two find themselves declaring their undying love for one another; and ultimately, they move beyond words and express their love in a kiss. Sarah, the silent spectator in the play, witnesses the kiss and finds her voice to tell Manus of the scene. The scene plays out:

> (*Pause. Suddenly they kiss. Sarah enters. She sees them. She stands shocked, staring at them. Her mouth works. Then almost to herself.*)
> SARAH. Manus … Manus!
> (*Sarah runs off.*) (430)

Here the audience realizes that Sarah has been led to speak outside of her prescribed communication. With the phrase, "*her mouth works*," and the line: "Manus … Manus!," Friel suggests to the audience that Sarah has claimed her voice and is able to speak beyond her memorized phrase of identification. It is "through performance, [that] this marginalised, silenced character is reinvested with a voice" (Gilbert and Tompkins 191). The simple two-word line, where Sarah *names* Manus, launches Sarah into her moment of rupture where she breaks her silence to relate information not requested of her.

Sarah's moment of rupture is Friel's message for the play. As Sarah breaches her silence to speak a new phrase, Friel's audience witnesses the potential of the silent spectator. In her moment of rupture Sarah, as a representative of Ireland itself, speaks out for the first time in words that are not memorized or provided to her by her colonizer. As the silent figure is "reinvested with a voice," Friel encourages the members of his audiences to regain their voice, lost to them by the trauma of their past. Here Sarah demonstrates the potential of rebirth as she speaks out against the British colonizer Yolland.

Immediately following the line "Manus… Manus…" the scene ends and the play jumps to "*The following evening. It is raining*" (Friel 430). The audience never witnesses the scene between Manus and Sarah when she tells him of what she had seen. Unlike Lily in *The Freedom of the City*, Sarah's moment of rupture occurs offstage; the audience does not hear her freed voice. Like the violence in a Greek tragedy, we are left to imagine, to hope for, what her moment of freedom was. From the information Friel provides, the audience assumes that during the moment of rupture Sarah speaks to Manus for the first time of something complex; she shares with him information that was not requested. Here she *initiates* the conversation and runs towards Manus, shouting his name. As the scene ends with those words, we anticipate that Sarah's conversation with Manus is verbal and not physical. Although she is the bearer of bad news, the scene indicates that she has realized her voice, a victory for the woman doomed to a life of mimicry and silence.

While having the offstage moment of rupture may at first appear problematic for Irish audiences, I assert that this choice (obviously intentional) is not problematic but rather more in line with Friel's work and emblematic of Friel's particular intentions for *Translations*. This play is all about the offstage world. Not one line specifically mentions the English Ordnance Survey, and yet the ideal Irish audience knows that the play is indeed about that historical moment. The characters never talk about the dangers of colonization, but audiences read this warning into the play. Even a review of the most recent Broadway production discusses this: "The attempt to impose a new civilization on a subjugated country by force looms as the background for the smaller personal dramas that take up much of the casually drawn narrative" (Isherwood par. 14). The historical

world seeps into the characters, but by leaving it offstage, Friel takes away the sentimentality of it. Like our ancient Greek theatrical audiences, Irish audience members know the historical story and therefore do not need to see it performed outright in front of them. In addition, the choice for the offstage moment of rupture affirms Friel's alignment of Sarah with the Irish nation. Friel chooses to leave Sarah's realization of her voice offstage in order to allow Irish audiences to fill in their own moments of rupture. By leaving Sarah's moment of rupture offstage, Friel asks his audience members to participate in the excavation of the missing narratives. The audience is therefore invited to fill in those narrative gaps. Language, in this case, is defined through absence.

Sarah's moment of rupture is unique not only because it occurs offstage but because there is no theatrical rupture of the fourth wall. Additionally, unlike Lily's rupture in *The Freedom of the City*, the timeline of the play does not stop; rather, it continues without us. The audience is not given the privilege of hearing Sarah's interior monologue, but her burst of language—unheard by the audience—is what moves the play into its final tragic third act. The final act, acting as the Greek messenger who relates the violence of the offstage world, allows the audience to witness the effects of her un-witnessed speech: a rupture in the lives of the Baile Beag citizens. Sarah's conversation with Manus sends her town into a downward spiral of burning homes, livestock, and land. The events in the third act are a response to the missing scene, and through them the audience must piece together what Sarah freely spoke of when she ran towards her oppressor.

Dust to Dust:
the consequential effects

Immediately following Sarah's moment of rupture the scene shifts to the schoolroom the following evening. Sarah and Owen are alone but acutely aware that Manus is planning to leave to take a new job that has become available. Sarah is, as the stage directions read, "*more waiflike than ever. … She is pretending to read but her eyes keep going up to the room upstairs*" (Friel 430). Although still quiet compared to the other characters in the play, Sarah speaks more in Act Three than she has at any point during the play. We even hear her speak words that we have not witnessed her learning; it seems that, at first, her moment of rupture has freed up her tongue. But the conditions surrounding her quickly begin to entrap her, and she moves into her old silence. This deliberate choice by Friel implies not only that the female must continually choose to break her silence and live by her own definition of self, but that Ireland too must continually choose to regain its heritage and voice to avoid the trap of silence and a slow death of history.

Once Manus and Sarah are alone in the opening minutes of Act Three, Sarah begins to apologize to Manus, who is leaving now that he has discovered Maire with Yolland. The scene reads:

> SARAH. Manus … Manus, I …
> (*Manus hears Sarah but makes no acknowledgement. He gathers up his belongings.*) (431)

Although the line is the same as that which leads her to speak at the end of Act Two, here the words "Manus… Manus…" push her in the opposite direction—to further silence. By not responding, Manus quiets Sarah. He refuses to give her any attention and she

responds by recoiling. Here Manus's silence is indicative of his oppression as an impaired Irishman who has been defeated by the British; here his story also reflects the silenced Ireland. But as Manus retreats into silence, he also displaces his anger and frustration onto Sarah and locks her back into her silent cell. Her silence is a physical embodiment of her oppression.

In Act Three, the audience learns that Yolland has disappeared. The British army is unable to find him and, because of Sarah's moment of rupture the previous evening, Manus had gone out to confront Yolland:

> MANUS. I had a stone in my hand when I went out looking for him – I was going to fell him. The lame scholar turned violent.
> OWEN. Did anybody see you?
> MANUS. But when I saw him standing there at the side of the road smiling – and her face buried in his shoulder – I couldn't even go close to them. I just shouted something stupid – something like, 'You're a bastard, Yolland.' If I'd even said it in English … 'cos he kept saying 'Sorry-sorry?' The wrong gesture in the wrong language. (432)

Owen's fear is that Manus's departure will raise suspicion about his role in the disappearance of Yolland. But Manus plans to leave without relating the story of his encounter with Yolland the previous evening; he must get out of the place that has so rapidly changed before him. Before he goes he makes one last attempt to guide Sarah, in a scene reminiscent of the opening moment of the play. Friel is careful to ask for a specific tone from his actors in this moment, which suggests Manus's power over his pupil. And Sarah, desperate to apologize, responds in a haunting moment that reminds the audience of the depth of her colonization:

> (*Manus picks up his bag briskly and goes towards the door. He stops a few paces beyond Sarah, turns, comes back to her. He addresses her as he did in Act One but now without warmth or concern for her.*)
> MANUS. What is your name? (*Pause.*) Come on. What is your name?

> SARAH. My name is Sarah.
> MANUS. Just Sarah? Sarah what? (*Pause.*) Well?
> SARAH. Sarah Johnny Sally.
> MANUS. And where do you live? Come on.
> SARAH. I live in Bun na hAbhann.
> (*She is crying now.*)
> MANUS. Very good, Sarah Johnny Sally. There's nothing to stop you now – nothing in the wide world. (*Pause. He looks down at her.*) It's all right – it's all right – you did no harm – you did no harm at all. (433)

Echoing his own words in Act One, Manus tells Sarah "There's nothing to stop you now – nothing in the wide world." The distinguishing feature between the two lines is that here Manus removes himself from the line, saying *you* instead of *us*. Through her repetition of the phrase "My name is Sarah" and her claiming of the Irish town name, Sarah demonstrates her desire to please Manus one last time. Interestingly, it is this desire to please that leads Manus to separate himself from her, and to lead him to tell her that he is not—or at least is no longer—angry with her. In an almost paradoxical way here Manus both asserts his power over Sarah and releases her and sends her out on her own. Freed from his grip, Sarah quietly apologizes to Manus after he has gone saying, "I'm sorry… I'm sorry… I'm so sorry, Manus…" (434). These are Sarah's final words in the play—an apology for her voice and its effect on Manus's life. Sarah apologizes for her ruptured moment, afraid that her choice to speak has been the cause of such turmoil: "It is Sarah's words which reveal to Manus a painful reality, and Sarah, her personal life in chaos and her town renamed by the English, lapses into the protection of total silence" (Lojek 87). The "protection" of silence that Lojek describes is best defined as "seclusion." While the breach in silence may have instigated the events of the third act, Friel does not suggest that a retreat back into silence is the solution. The play instead informs audiences that while speaking out against trauma and oppression, or even just

about a painful reality of loss and oppression, will be difficult and the effects, at times, potentially catastrophic (an idea not at all foreign to Northern Irish audiences who witness this play for the first time during the Troubles), the consequences of silence and retreat are far worse. The character Sarah stands in to remind audiences of this fact, her ghostly presence a haunting reminder of the cost of retreating and remaining in the silence of oppression and loss.

As the play comes to its close the British have entered the schoolhouse to inform the Irish of their plans to desecrate the towns unless Yolland is found. The scene that ensues speaks of the trouble with language as Owen must painfully translate the horrors that will fall upon the town until Yolland returns:

> LANCEY. Commencing twenty-four hours from now we will shoot all livestock in Ballybeg.[5]
> (*Owen stares at Lancey.*)
> At once.
> OWEN. Beginning this time tomorrow they'll kill every animal in Baile Beag – unless they're told where George is.
> LANCEY. If that doesn't bear results, commencing forty-eight hours from now we will embark on a series of evictions and leveling of every abode in the following selected areas –
> OWEN. You're not – !
> LANCEY. Do your job. Translate. (439)

The scene demonstrates the colonial power over both individuals and an entire community. Owen is scolded, indeed his voice is cut off, for stepping outside his boundaries; he must not comment on what is being said, but only translate for his community. Here the colonizer asserts his power and puts Owen in his place; Owen

[5] Although pronounced the same way as its Irish counterpart, here the Anglicized spelling of the town is used. This technique subtly shows the disappearance of the original Irish town.

discovers that he is caught, a colonized victim forced to do the work of the colonizer, because it is his "job."

The final scene also demonstrates a loss in the character Sarah. As Sarah slips into silence, her learned speech is lost—her history locked away: "As Sarah is beginning to learn, she is silenced by Captain Lancey. Thus, she is not even allowed to express her own identity by saying her own name" (Dantanus 191).

> LANCEY. *(Pointing to Sarah)* Who are you? Name!
> *(Sarah's mouth opens and shuts, opens and shuts. Her face becomes contorted.)*
> What's your name?
> *(Again Sarah tries frantically.)*
> OWEN. Go on, Sarah. You can tell him.
> *(But Sarah cannot. And she knows she cannot. She closes her mouth. Her head goes down.)*
> OWEN. Her name is Sarah Johnny Sally. (Friel 440)

Friel emphasizes Sarah's dual colonization when the colonizer of the nation also becomes the colonizer of the female. Lancey forces her into submission until an Irish male answers for her. As Sarah realizes that she "cannot" speak, Lancey is affirmed in his tactics and the British maintain their control over Ireland and its people. Ireland's trauma, and the trauma of the doubly oppressed woman, has entered into Sarah until she is no longer able to articulate it. The play ends without hope of her speaking, and she returns to her isolated oppression.

As the play closes, Friel suggests one more twist in the story; he alludes to the foreboding Potato Famine which will fall upon the Irish with devastating effect. One of the students, Bridget, is in a panic about the fires that the British have begun to light to express their seriousness about Yolland being found. The play reads: (*Bridget runs to the door and stops suddenly. She sniffs the air. Panic*.). Then she says, "The sweet smell!

Smell it! It's the sweet smell! Jesus, it's the potato blight!" (441). In this one line Friel hints towards a continuation of the trauma that has infected the society; the colonized nation receives no relief as they move from the English Ordnance Survey to the Famine. As the Irish move forward, their stories will continue to perish with the victims of the next traumatic event.

The play leaves the audience with a word of caution spoken through the character of Hugh, the learned teacher. As characters begin to understand how their lives have been altered, Hugh picks up the Name-Book and reads the "*strange names*" (444) aloud:

> HUGH. Ballybeg. Burnfoot. King's Head. Whiteplains. Fair Hill. Dunboy. Greenbank. … We must learn those new names. … We must learn where we live. We must learn to make them our own. We must make them our new home. (444)

The line reiterates the pain of loss. Within the play, the Irish not only lose their language but they literally lose their homes to the English destruction. Here Hugh makes the connection between the two losses, encouraging his students to make the trauma of these losses a part of who they are. But he also cautions against being overtaken by the trauma; they must move forward into a new reality and world. As she retreats into her silence, Sarah represents the figure who has become subsumed by her trauma. She stands as a warning to audiences; that trauma, left undefined and unarticulated, can and will overpower its victims. The play provides an option new to the Irish society; it asks the audience to embrace their own trauma, to see it as a part of themselves, and perhaps, through embracing it, to heal the scars left by generations of affliction.

CHAPTER THREE

"MATURE WOMEN, DANCING?"[1]: COMMUNAL FREEDOM IN *DANCING AT LUGHNASA*

> Dancing at Lughnasa*, for all its presentiment of the breaking up of the rural social order in the 1930s, produces an effect in the theatre … of something at the very heart of life, of the victory of human resilience and love over the tyrannies of fate.*
>
> *—Christopher Fitz-Simon*[2]

Brian Friel's twentieth play, *Dancing at Lughnasa*, differs from the other plays discussed in this dissertation, as it is not based on nor is it about one single historical Irish event. The play, written in 1990, focuses on a family of Catholic sisters, the Mundys, living together in the newly formed Irish Free State on the eve of the industrial revolution. The play examines the five women: Kate, Maggie, Agnes, Rose, and Chris, and exposes the way their lives are forever altered by imposing patriarchal forces (represented by the return of the eldest Mundy sibling, Father Jack) and by modernization (forced into the home via a radio). Prior to the introduction of these elements Friel establishes the Mundy women as victims of their past, trapped by a haunting nostalgia and locked into stereotypical gendered domestic roles. The outside elements that force their way into the lives of these women bring about the sisters' communal moment of rupture where, for the first time, they live in the present.

Set in the 1930s and written in the 1990s—both times of transition in Ireland and Northern Ireland respectively, *Dancing at Lughnasa* encourages Irish audiences to move

[1] Friel, Brian. *Dancing at Lughnasa*, pp. 25.
[2] *The Abbey Theatre: Ireland's National Theatre the First 100 Years*, pp. 169.

out of nostalgia for an Ireland of the past to encounter an Ireland of the present. Friel does so by writing characters who seem to be attempting to grasp a world that no longer exists—that has been lost in the void caused by trauma. Through the characters, the play demonstrates that although the immediate present might be painful, it is only by breaking away from the past that wounds of trauma begin to heal.

Friel places the action of *Dancing at Lughnasa* in the village of Ballybeg[3] in County Donegal, Ireland in 1936. The play, one of Friel's most famous, "inspects the dysfunctional family from a distance. In looking back to the 1930s and interrogating at source [sic] the breakup of the traditional order in Irish society, Friel is at his subtle, terrifying best" (Murray, *Twentieth-Century Irish Drama* 227). Told as a memory play, which calls to mind Tennessee William's *Glass Menagerie*, *Dancing at Lughnasa* is narrated by Michael, the son of the sister Chris. Now a young man, Michael narrates the events of a summer when he was seven years old,[4] when outside forces threatened and ultimately ended the life the family once knew. The summer stands out in the narrator's mind because of two contradicting memories. The first is the rapidly approaching trend of modernization, symbolically intruding on the family's life through their first wireless set. The second is the imposing patriarchy represented by the return of Father Jack, eldest brother of the Mundys, who has returned from a twenty-five year mission trip in a Ugandan leper colony. In his opening soliloquy Michael informs the audience: "when I

[3] Ballybeg is one of Friel's favorite locales for his plays; this is the same Ballybeg as *Translations*.
[4] The same actor plays Michael the narrator and Michael at seven. Friel writes specific instructions for the way this theatrical device is to function. The first time one of the sisters, Maggie, address seven year old Michael comes with the following stage directions: "*The convention must now be established that the (imaginary) Boy Michael is working at the kite materials lying on the ground. No dialogue with the Boy Michael must ever be addressed directly to adult Michael, the narrator. Here, for example, Maggie has her back to the narrator. Michael responds to Maggie in his ordinary narrator's voice"* (7).

cast my mind back to that summer of 1936, these two memories – of our first wireless and of Father Jack's return – are always linked" (Friel 2).

Friel writes a narrator in many of his plays, but Michael's role in *Dancing at Lughnasa* differs from the others. Typically, "Friel's storytellers/narrators tend to be observers, voyeurs looking on, partaking in the action, but usually they are only at the fringes or at the perimeters; seldom are they totally immersed in the situation" (Jordan "Metatheatricalisation of Memory" par. 2). Michael, however, does not sit on the sidelines in *Dancing at Lughnasa*; he is, as Jordan articulates, "both narrator and intruder" (par. 2). He not only describes the memory; he participates in it. Scholars have asserted varying claims about Michael's role in a story that is so focused on the female. Many challenge Friel's choice to use a male narrator, claiming that by his doing the female characters are weakened and only represented via a male perspective. I argue that although this narrator is male, the female characters are not puppets to his narration, nor are they objectified. Instead, Michael's memories give life to the reality of the Irish female in the early 20th century.

Often called Friel's autobiographical play, *Dancing at Lughnasa*'s dedication reads: "In memory of those five brave Glenties women" (Friel *Dancing*). Having been raised by a strong mother and her sisters, and as the father of four daughters, Friel often speaks of the strong female presence in his life. But the play not only acknowledges the strength of the female; it also addresses the limitations placed on her by society in the early 20th century. The sisters are listed in Friel's script according to their age and role within the family unit, framing them with the duties they perform:

Kate, forty, schoolteacher
Maggie, thirty-eight, housekeeper
Agnes, thirty-five, knitter
Rose, thirty-two, knitter
Chris, twenty-six, Michael's mother (3)

Throughout the play the women hold fast to their roles, silenced by society's standards when they try to step out of them. Their adherence to these domesticated duties is one example that demonstrates the depth of the oppression forced upon the women.

Within the family each sister plays her own role. Kate is the eldest and the breadwinner for the family. She acts as head of household, making decisions for the rest of the women. Through her occasional references to her mother, it is evident that Kate feels the burden of responsibility; she is looking forward to turning over that responsibility to Father Jack. Maggie is the second eldest; she is "a spirited woman with a tremendous sense of fun, which is, of course, also a means of survival, her bubbling vitality holding off despair" (Jones 169). Maggie enjoys her role as the baker and embraces her role as Michael's aunt. Agnes is graceful in movement and personality. She has taken on the responsibility as caretaker of Rose and brings a small income into the home with her knitting. Rose is described by Friel as 'simple'. "Her disability is akin to that of Manus and Sarah in *Translations*, denoting that all is not well in the society" (Jones 171). Rose assists Agnes in knitting and cares for the rooster who lives outside the home. She brings joy to the family much as Michael does, but her disability also brings stress as outsiders easily seduce her. Finally Chris, only twenty-six, is Michael's mother. She desires a real relationship with Gerry Evans, Michael's father, who abandons them both with an ease that is painful to witness.

The sisters, however, are not only bound by their gendered roles within the family. They are also paralyzed by fear. They fear the invading modernization that threatens their livelihood and the Pagan past that enters into their lives with the festival of Lughnasa looming in the background of the play. The sisters are not content with their present lives and yet they cannot find a path forward; instead they retreat to nostalgia, falling into the metaphorical crevasse, reminiscing of a simpler time when their future held nothing but possibility. The retreat into memory is the women's coping technique, yet in retreating they are halted by fear of imminent unfamiliarity.

This fear echoes the paralysis of the doubly oppressed female. In *Dancing at Lughnasa* the trauma of the Irish female is highlighted not by a national trauma, but by the complete absence of the national trauma and of any physical colonizer in the women's lives. The Mundy sisters still live the lives of the dually colonized despite the fact that they have been without a male head of home or a national colonizer for several years. Although the women live within a patriarchal Ireland, the locale of the play (the family home) is removed from the main village where patriarchy is at its most extreme. The play suggests that the women's oppression is so ingrained into the characters that the Mundy home still functions as though under the power of an external force. They have been lost into a void from which they do not nor cannot find an escape. In an interesting move Friel writes into the play the sisters' desire for their returning brother to take his place as head of the home. This reinforces the idea that the women still live within the boundaries of their trauma even though the external forces are not in place.

But *Dancing at Lughnasa* tells the story of the power of change. As the women encounter cultural disruptions that enter into their lives, they realize freedom from the

trauma that confines them and they are able to move out of the paralysis of their oppression. Friel dramatizes this discovery of freedom in the women's collaborative moment of rupture—a moment not classified as speech (as in *The Freedom of the City* and *Translations*) but as dance, a different but rich vocabulary, which excavates their silenced emotions. In this moment, the home is disrupted; in the sisters' freedom the kitchen is turned into a dance hall, overturning the highly symbolic space of female domesticity. The moment of rupture is an awakening for the women. Ultimately, the elements that bring about this freedom force the women out of their oppressive nostalgia, thrusting them into a painful present. Their domesticated roles are violently taken away from them, and the traumatically-defined identities they once had are removed, leaving a void where they can begin to redefine themselves.

Choreographing the Steps:
the history of the play

Although Field Day had been producing Friel's plays for nearly a decade and had gained world-wide recognition for its productions and literary efforts in Northern Ireland, the early nineties brought a change for the company. *Dancing at Lughnasa* marked the end of Friel's connection to Field Day when, after nine years of exclusively writing plays within the company, Friel decided to produce *Dancing at Lughnasa* outside of Field Day at Ireland's national theatre. The move was a sign of Friel's wavering commitment to the company, which he confirmed when he resigned from the board in 1994.

In 1990 *Dancing at Lughnasa* opened to great acclaim at the Abbey Theatre in Dublin. Glorifying reviews flooded the papers, each not only discussing the breathtaking acting but also praising Friel for his graceful writing. One reviewer wrote of the

production, “At such times there is no doubting we are in the thrall of as masterly a dramatist as the theatre possesses” (Nightingale par. 7).

The success of the play lead to multiple revivals over the next decade; “it also played in London and New York, where it gathered a cornucopia of awards, and at one time two Abbey casts were performing it simultaneously in different corners of the world” (Fitz-Simon 169). After productions at the Abbey in Dublin and London’s West End, the production moved to New York where in 1992 it received eight Tony nominations and three wins for Best Play, Best Featured Actress (Brid Brennan as Agnes), and Best Director (Patrick Mason, who also directed the premiere production in Dublin).

Dancing at Lughnasa has been called the best play of Friel’s entire career. “It has power to move audiences that transcends national barriers, or familiarity with theatre styles, or political preoccupations” (Coult 106). Theatre scholar Anthony Roche discusses Friel’s bold choice of writing five strong women into the play, offering up this choice as a reason for the success of the play:

> In distributing the dramatic weight equally among five female characters, he is writing against the symbolisation of woman so central to the nationalist tradition. If he has struck a first blow against the traditional dramatic hierarchy by splitting the male lead, he subverts it more radically by moving the five women in *Lughnasa* into the dramatic centre. (284)

The play’s strength lies in its ability to bring the Irish female out of her symbolic role in Irish theatre, where she is so often represented as mother Ireland or a Cathleen Ni Houlihan, Shan Van Vocht[5] figure, and instead brings her into light as an individual

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[5] The Shan Van Vocht figure, a poor old women, comes from William Butler Yeats’s play *Cathleen Ni Houlihan*. This mythical figure represents Mother Ireland and is a symbol of nationalist pride.

struggling within a patriarchal system. In this play Friel moves away from writing a single powerful Irish female, such as Lily or Sarah, to writing about a community of women, giving each character her own struggles.

Incredibly, despite such attention to the female psyche in the play, some reviewers still missed the importance of the feminine story that is being told. Claire Armitstead, a reviewer of the 1990 London production focused on the character Michael, deciding the play focused solely on him and the men that entered his life in his memory. She writes "Michael's world is all we have for the imminent breakup of the household, for his father's absconsion [sic] to an International Brigade he never got round to joining, and for his great-uncle's [sic] impenitent death" (par. 4). But many reviewers did find the sisters' story to be the crux of the piece. London reviewers likened the play to Chekhov's *Three Sisters*, a notable comparison as Friel not only draws from Chekhovian drama but has written many versions of Chekhov's plays including *Three Sisters*. Benedict Nightingale even wrote, "Friel has the Chekhovian gift of simultaneously seeing his people from outside, feeling them from inside, and knowing what they are thinking about each other even when they are silent" (par. 5). By equating Friel to Chekhov, the reviewer lifts Friel into a league of canonic writers, elevating his status in the theatre world. But it is not only Friel's characters that are Chekhovian. As Chekhov does with his Russian characters, Friel situates the Mundy family in a crucial time and space in the country's history.

Back to the Barre:
the historical context

Set in 1936, *Dancing at Lughnasa* wrestles with the role of women in a post-partition, pre-Troubles era. The play discusses how local and global elements affect the lives of the sisters to varying degrees. While Ireland struggled with its own newfound freedom, the modernization impacting the larger world encroached upon the small villages in rural Ireland. Friel situates the action of the play in a town that, because of its location near the Northern Irish border, was particularly affected by the 1922 split. For the next decades, the newly freed Irish State underwent a crisis as it tried to determine its identity.

With the island's attention on national politics, patriarchal relations strengthened at home, and 1930s Ireland found women suffering, oppressed by strict rules and systems. Within the play, the Mundy sisters are unique because they are physically free from national and patriarchal colonizers. However, trapped by their ingrained sensibilities, the women still live as though being oppressed by both. This life is a symptom of the trauma that the women have endured by living in a dually colonized society for the majority of their lives. The mechanism of the trauma in Friel's play echoes the trauma that Caruth articulates; the trauma is "not locatable in the simple violent or original event in an individual's past, but rather in the way that its very unassimilated nature—the way it was precisely *not known* in the first instance—returns to haunt the survivor later on" (4). The actions of the women show how the trauma, not locatable in a single event, still has an effect on their lives. The trauma has become part of their identity

– written into their very existence and their relationships to one another and the world around them.

Although the play is not political in a strict sense like *The Freedom of the City* or even *Translations*, Friel writes into the text lines that suggest the sisters align themselves with Eamonn de Valera, who turned his back on the treaty of 1922 that lead to Ireland's divide, saying that it would hinder the chance for a united Ireland free from British rule. In the very first scene Maggie sings a song about one of the early Republican leaders and Rose joins in. They sing:

> Will you vote for De Valera, will you vote?
> If you don't, we'll be like Gandhi with his goat.
> Uncle Bill from Baltinglass has a wireless up his –
> Will you vote for De Valera, will you vote? (Friel 4)

The audience is further informed of Kate's political views when Michael states in one of his early soliloquies, "… Aunt Kate had been involved locally in the War of Independence; so Father Jack's brief career in the British army was never referred to in that house" (8). Although the women do not specifically speak of political topics, the song about the first President of the free Republic, along with the reference to Kate's involvement in the War of Independence, indicate that the family supports a free Ireland.

The struggle for complete independence is not the only aspect of 1930s Ireland that Friel writes into the play. Like many women in this time and location, the sisters live within a strong patriarchal society, which seeps into the play through discussions from the town and Kate's school. Although the Mundy home is technically matriarchal, without a man to guide the family, their actions suggest otherwise. They are "five women alone against the world," (par. 4) as author Maeve Binchy states. In her article "Gone

With the Wind of Change" Binchy describes how the Mundy sisters fit into 1930s Ireland. She writes of that time, "Life for women since 1922 should have been joyful and optimistic, but too often it was blighted by the fear of raising a head too high over a parapet: a woman who called attention to herself was a woman who would not win" (par. 2). Not unlike many families of the 1930s, in which male emigration was the norm, the Mundy family is comprised of five single women, without much wealth or dignity. The family does have one "flaw", the son born out of wedlock to the youngest sister, Chris. In the early 20th century an unmarried mother was considered an outcast in society. Some were sent to Magdalen asylums where they "were particularly harshly treated" (Owens 175).[6] Friel's character, Chris, is saved from that degradation with the help of her sisters who take in Michael and raise him as their own.

The play is situated in a pivotal moment in the family's life when the eldest Mundy child, and the only brother in the Mundy family, Father Jack, returns home. The sisters take joy in his arrival for reasons beyond reunion. As a Catholic priest, Father Jack brings dignity to the family, a dignity that has undoubtedly wavered since the birth of Michael. A priest carried clout during the 1930s as "it was a country where you would as soon walk naked down the street as be known not to attend Mass" (Binchy par. 2). But Father Jack is also a danger to the matriarchal world that they have lived in for the past twenty-five years. As Father Jack enters the scene, the sisters, while trying to identify the bars that bind them in their oppression, must adjust to the potential threat to the freedom that they are so carefully trying to discover. In a sign of their trauma the sisters ask him to

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[6] The story of Magdalen asylums has been told to the world via the 2002 award winning film *The Magdalen Sisters*, written and directed by Peter Mullan. The story chronicles three young women who enter the asylum for various reasons (one due to a pre-marriage pregnancy) and proceeds to follow them through aggressive abuse as they live out their days with Irish nuns.

take his place as head of the home, inviting a physical representation of the patriarchal oppression that they already live by. Problems arise, however, when Father Jack refuses to take his place both as the patriarch in the family and the Catholic Priest to the community, leaving the sisters without guidance spiritually and relationally.

The 1930s also marked significant progression in technology and industry in Ireland and around the world as "modernisation is replacing the old certainties" (Jones 155). This element of modernization looms over the play, threatening to breach the family wall. This element, as we discover at the end of the play, indeed breaks in to disrupt and eventually disintegrate the family unit.

Head, Arms, Legs, and Feet:
elements at play

Memory

With these historical details written into the text, Friel employs a popular theatrical technique to guide the audience through the various elements: memory. Memory fuels the play, giving the story, and the family, the momentum it needs to push through the summer of 1936. But memory not only gives service to the plot, it also acts as a metaphor for Ireland. Indeed "the process of memory within the play serves as a metaphor perhaps, for the way in which the Irish nation itself records, dramatises, negotiates with its past(s), and how it celebrates, passes on, bestows and inherits memory" (Jordan "Metatheatricalisation of Memory" par. 6). The play uses this process of memory to record a summer of an imagined family on the cusp of freedom and destruction, of celebration and ruin.

The plot of *Dancing at Lughnasa* moves gracefully forward with the idea of memory propelling it. Through the narrator, Michael, "Friel brings together in this play memory and dancing, the sacred and the profane, ritual and transcendence in a brilliantly complicated fashion. Michael is a memory maker, and the play is a dream catcher of sorts" (Jordan "Metatheatricalisation of Memory" par. 1). Although the play itself is Michael's memory, which he tells the audience in his first line of the play saying "When I cast my mind back to that summer of 1936 different kinds of memory offer themselves to me"[7] (Friel 1), the main action of the play only has one timeline. While it is true that Michael speaks to the audience from a future self, the audience is not given any specifics of his "present." Throughout the play Michael provides clues about what the "present" is with lines such as "Somewhere in the mid-fifties I got a letter" (61) implying that he is speaking from at least the late-1950s or early 1960s. But beyond subtle hints to Michael's timeline the audience is left without details. And so the play, for its part, maintains a single timeline – the summer of 1936.

The characters within that timeline are trapped by their nostalgia. While the narration frames the main action of the play with a sense of contentedness, the characters within the play, primarily the Mundy sisters, are anything but content. Within Michael's memory—within the play—the sisters themselves long for a previous time. This longing is evidenced in the way that the sisters often speak of the past; this reminiscing signifies the hope that was gradually lost as they settled into their lives. In their memories they return to a time of anticipation for a better life. Maggie recalls being in love; Kate calls

[7] This is also one of Michael's last lines in the play. He repeats this opening line to move into his final discussion of the dance.

upon her mother who has long since passed; Agnes silently longs for Gerry; Rose, although most content with her present experience, remembers a simpler time; and Chris often returns to the time when she and Gerry planned for a future together.

Throughout the play the audience witnesses the sisters' retreat into memory. Together they relate stories of a past time, reminiscing while simultaneously informing the audience. Maggie is particularly fond of calling up the past, and although she is the most optimistic and comedic of the group, the audience senses her hidden sadness at her missed opportunities. In one scene Kate mentions to Maggie that she has run into an old friend, Bernie O'Donnell, saying:

> But asking specially for you, Maggie: how you were doing – what you were doing – how were you looking – were you as light-hearted as ever? Everytime she thinks of you, she says, she has the memory of the two of you hiding behind the turf stack, passing a cigarette between you and falling about laughing about some boy called – what was it? – Curley somebody? (19)

To which Maggie, uncharacteristically replies with some seriousness, "Curley McDaid. An eejit of a fella. Bald as an egg at seventeen. Bernie McDonnell … oh my goodness …" (19). In this line, and in the pause that follows it, the audience witnesses Maggie's longing for a simpler time, when the future held possibility.

Bindings

Friel begins *Dancing at Lughnasa* demonstrating how the women's lives are run by their ingrained oppression and their continuous retreat into their past. Through the introduction of the Mundy sisters' domesticated duties, the extremity of their Catholic faith, and their adherence to a patriarchal rule, Friel sets up the women as victims of a self-imposed prison. The setting of the play highlights the sisters' trauma as it signifies

the tension between their own space and the outside world, which the women feel overpowered by.

The action of the play takes place in two spaces. The first is the kitchen, which according to Friel's stage directions takes up "slightly more than half the area of the stage." The kitchen, a symbolic space, is the center of the play and the focus of the Mundy sisters' lives. Friel captures the kitchen as "the heart of the home" (Hill 20) for his characters, by placing the majority of the play's action there. Here his characters feel at peace; here they feel safe. The kitchen is a familiar space, one where the work of the home takes place. The rest of the stage is taken up by the garden that adjoins the house. The tension of these settings, literally outside world versus inside world, lies at the crux of this play. Throughout the play the sisters, and the home, undergo a drastic and inevitable change brought on by the outside elements that encroach on the home and the Mundy lifestyle. While some of the sisters seem to understand the imminent transformation, others, like Kate, try desperately to hold onto their idyllic views about the home and family, refusing to believe an alternate way of life could provide the freedom and healing they so desperately require.

Friel writes the sisters in such a way that the audience immediately understands the seemingly unbreakable bond between them. Kate, Maggie, Agnes, Rose, and Chris each function as part of a larger whole. It is not insignificant that the family seems to embody the Christian ideals expressed by the apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians; "Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts for one body, so it is with Christ" (*Today's New International Version Bible* 1 Corinthians 12:12). The family, strict in their Catholic heritage, has formed their family to act as one body, each member of the family

acting as one part. Each sister plays a specific role in the family, again following the message found in the New Testament about individual roles in the church: "Even so the body is not made up of one part but of many… If they were all one part, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, but one body" (*Today's New International Version Bible* 1 Corinthians 14, 19 – 20). The beginning of the play demonstrates a "functioning body" for the Mundy family as the women perform their domesticated gendered roles. But after Friel's moment of rupture, the play shows the decay of the Mundy body when individuals cease to function as part of a larger whole.

Within the first moments of *Dancing at Lughnasa* the audience witnesses the domesticated roles that the women perform. The first scene takes place in the kitchen and Friel is clear in his stage directions about the duties the characters are to perform:

> *[They] busy themselves with their tasks. Maggie makes a mash for hens. Agnes knits gloves. Rose carries a basket of turf into the kitchen and empties it into the large box* beside *the range. Chris irons at the kitchen table. They all work in silence.* (Friel 2)

These stereotypically female tasks are the first introduction the audience has to these characters. The scene depicts a family trapped by the duties of the home. Maggie is in the kitchen preparing food; Agnes sits knitting; Rose carries peat in to heat the stove for cooking, and Chris irons the family's clothes. In this opening sequence, the space becomes both comforting and limiting. "The home… was considered to be the woman's domain, and early twentieth-century discourse increasingly confined her within its boundaries" (Hill 21). This is the home that Friel writes for the Mundy sisters. At the beginning of the play they appear contented within the confines of their roles, unaware of the patriarchal standard they define. This is the substance of their lives. The fact that Friel

would introduce his characters in such a manner tells his audience that these women are tied to these tasks—these roles. Throughout the play we see Maggie in the kitchen time and again. Agnes knits and gets dinner on the table nightly. Chris is first a mother to Michael, but also a homemaker. These characters' identities are formed by the home tasks they perform and the feminine domestic roles they play.

The one sister who has not been confined by the boundaries of the home, and is notably absent from the opening scene, is the eldest, Kate. Kate is a school-teacher, a position which, during the 1930s, was "regarded as a 'natural' sphere for women" (Hill 47). When Kate enters into the space of the home, the tasks remain the same but the mood changes. Kate runs the household as if it were her classroom, taking over the scene in a disciplinarian fashion; she is "the embodiment of conservative repression" (Corbett 132).

While the play suggests that the sisters work together to create a whole, Friel starts the play when that whole is being broken. The first lines of the play provide an image that foreshadows the looming shattering of the family. Chris goes to a "tiny mirror on the wall" saying:

> CHRIS. When are we going to get a decent mirror to see ourselves in?
> MAGGIE. You can see enough to do you.
> CHRIS. I'm going to throw this aul cracked thing out.
> MAGGIE. Indeed you're not, Chrissie. I'm the one that broke it and the only way to avoid seven years bad luck is to keep on using it. (2-3)

The cracks on the mirror reflect the broken family. Just as Maggie desperately holds onto the mirror to avoid bad luck, so the sisters frantically cling to one another, and to their traumatized identities, until the end of the play when they have become so fractured that letting go is the only choice. By introducing the adherence to the domestic roles and a

crumbling family unit so early in his play, Friel implies that the sisters must and will eventually recognize the claustrophobic lives that they lead, bound by rules and imagined allegiance, and abandon each other for newfound freedom, however costly.

Another element of the women's lives that Friel establishes at the outset is the family's religious affiliation to the Catholic faith. Although Friel is careful not to criticize faith, the play implies that the women are bound by their extreme devotion. The family's religious preferences are brought up in Michael's first soliloquy, as he explains why Kate prefers the wireless set not be named "Lugh" after the pagan god.

> But Aunt Kate – she was a national schoolteacher and a very proper woman – she said it would be sinful to christen an inanimate object with any kind of name, not to talk of a pagan god. So we just called it Marconi because that was the name emblazoned on the set. (1)

Even before any action takes place the audience is given insight into the way the family is run – dictated by the morals and values of a conservative Catholic faith.

The first scenes of the play establish that Kate is the family's most devout. Before she enters the stage, the other sisters enjoy themselves, even testing their morals in an exchange between Rose and Maggie when Rose is dancing around the kitchen.

> MAGGIE. You should be on the stage, Rose.
> *(Rose continues to shuffle and now holds up her apron skirt.)*
> ROSE. And not a bad bit of leg, Maggie – eh?
> MAGGIE. Rose Mundy! Where's your modesty!
> *(Maggie now hitches her own skirt even higher than Rose's and does a similar shuffle.)*
> Is that not more like it? (3)

Without Kate present the sisters feel freedom to play around, laughing at the ridiculousness of the idea showing off their legs onstage. But once Kate enters the scene, the mood shifts and she reminds them of their place in the world as Christian women.

In another particularly telling scene Kate lashes out at her sister when Rose speaks of the Festival of Lughnasa occurring in their town. The festival consists partly of a dance in the hills around a large bonfire, and Rose explains that during this particular year, boys "were off their heads with drink. And young Sweeny's trousers caught fire and he went up like a torch" (16). Kate reprimands Rose for discussing this, calling upon their faith as her reasoning:

> *(Very angry, almost shouting)* And they're savages! I know those people from the back hills! I've taught them! Savages – that's what they are! And what pagan practices they have are no concern of ours – none whatever! It's a sorry day to hear talk like that in a Christian home, a Catholic home! All I can say is that I'm shocked and disappointed to hear you repeating rubbish like that, Rose! (17)

Since Kate acts as the head of home, the other women abide by her extreme adherence to the Catholic faith. Through interactions such as these Friel establishes the family as constricted by their faith, unable to attend or even discuss the festival. In setting up this faith as a binding force, Friel subtly brings to mind historical examples of Catholicism as a tool of colonial oppression. Interestingly here, and in Father Jack's mission to Uganda, Friel comments on this form of colonist oppression coming from within Ireland. Different from Friel's other plays that emphasize colonial relations between Ireland and England, *Dancing at Lughnasa* interrogates the oppressive relations between the Irish and their own cultural (religious) constraints. The women's oppression is not just from the patriarchy that reigns in the country, but also from their strict adherence to the Catholic faith.

After Friel establishes the depth of the women's oppression, he introduces several cultural disruptions into the home, namely Father Jack and Marconi (the radio which

symbolizes modernization). These disruptions not only act as a catalyst for the change that will occur in the home but bring the trauma and oppression of the women's lives to their attention. Friel writes into the beginning of the play the various elements that overwhelm the women, making the moment of rupture seem inevitable for the women. This exposition brings to a boil the trauma that confines the women; eventually this trauma must violently and dramatically go up in smoke.

Cultural Disruptions

Dancing at Lughnasa begins just after Father Jack has returned from Uganda, but Jack does not actually enter the stage until well into Act One after Friel has established the oppression experienced by the women. The first scenes demonstrate that although the home (as well as the tasks and roles within it) may be the women's domain, the Mundy sisters have left the role of male head open for Father Jack's return.

Kate in particular calls upon Father Jack's authority when making decisions for the family, placing him in the role even before the audience has met him. In one scene the sisters discuss the fun they would have at the Festival of Lughnasa dance. Even Agnes, the quietest of the group states her desire to attend and break out of her day-to-day life: "How many years has it been since we were at the harvest dance? – at any dance? And I don't care how young they are, how drunk and dirty and sweaty they are. I want to dance, Kate. It's the festival of Lughnasa. I'm only thirty-five. I want to dance" (13). Although she momentarily considers it, Kate ultimately halts the women's dreaming—criticizing her sisters for forgetting their place in the home. She says, "Do you want the whole countryside to be laughing at us? – women of our year? – mature women, *dancing?* What's come over you all? And this is Father Jack's home – we must never forget that –

ever. No, no, we're going to no harvest dance... And they'll be no more discussion about it. The matter's over. I don't want it mentioned again" (13-14). Here she not only stops her sisters from having fun but she reminds them of their gender, recalling their brother to his position as the head of their household. This line reaffirms Jack's role as the priestly head of the household, setting him up to step gracefully into his position and claim authority over the women and their choices. Here Kate reveals that her oppression has become her identity; the only way she knows to live is to create a physicalization of that colonization.

Father Jack, however, does not fit into the position left open for him. Because of his refusal to step into that role the sisters must re-assess the home and their roles within it. Their struggle with this refusal only emphasizes the depth of the colonization they feel. His abdication arises from his loss of Catholic faith during his time in Uganda and is compounded by a general mental confusion caused by malaria. Although his confusion and loss of Catholic faith are apparent to both the audience and some of the sisters, Kate refuses to see the truth of Father Jack's new identity; she continues to believe that he will wake up from the trance that consumes him to fulfill his duty of heading the household and saying Mass. Her sisters try to help her realize what seems so apparent, but she refuses to acknowledge it.

> KATE. … And the doctor says we must remember how strange everything here must be to him after so long. And on top of that Swahili has been his language for twenty-five years; so that it's not that his mind is confused – it's just that he has difficulty finding the English words for what he wants to say.
> CHRIS. No matter what the doctor says, Kate, his mind is a bit confused. Sometimes he doesn't know the difference between us. (11-12)

As the sisters describe incidents in which Father Jack's confusion is evident, Kate repeatedly provides reasons for the confusion and then moves onto a different topic, minimizing the extremity of his illness. After Chris tells Kate that Father Jack calls her "Okawa," Kate quickly retorts, saying: "Okawa was his house boy. He was very attached to him. (*Taking off her shoe*) I think I'm getting corns on this foot. I hope to God I don't end up crippled like poor mother, may she rest in peace" (12). Kate's change of subject illustrates her discomfort with Father Jack's newfound identity. She tries desperately to pretend that Father Jack's mind and faith will become clear with rest and that he will take up his rightful position as Catholic Priest in Ballybeg and head of the Mundy household.

Kate's anxiety about Father Jack becomes increasingly evident during a scene when Father Jack's "confused mind" intersects with his Ugandan faith. At the end of Act One Jack goes outside and, away from the confines of the home, picks up two sticks and begins to beat them together, creating a musical rhythm. Friel describes the moment in detail saying, "*Jack begins to shuffle-dance in time to his tattoo-his body slightly bent over, his eyes on the ground, his feet moving rhythmically. And as he dances – shuffles, he mutters – sings – makes occasional sounds that are incomprehensible and almost inaudible*" (42). The sisters witness this display of pagan rite and, after a moment, Kate brings an end to his ritualistic dance saying, "We'll leave these [sticks] back where we found them, Jack. They aren't ours. They belong to the child" (42). And so Kate continues for the rest of the play: desperately holding onto her nostalgic ideas of who and what Father Jack would become for the family, but in the end discovering that his faith is too far gone to fulfill the role she had set up for him.

As the play progresses Father Jack fulfills, in an unorthodox way, a different role for the family as he repairs the wounds of shame left by Michael's birth outside of marriage. Throughout the play Father Jack attempts to bring the Ugandan order into Ballybeg, renouncing his Christian faith for a more "pagan" one. In a particularly memorable moment Father Jack affirms Chris in her decision to have Michael out of wedlock – a decision that brought dishonor to the family. In this conversation, Father Jack learns that Michael has been raised without a father:

> JACK. And I have still to meet your husband.
> CHRIS. I'm not married. …
> JACK. So Michael is a love-child?
> CHRIS. I – yes – I suppose so. …
> JACK. You're lucky to have him.
> AGNES. We're all lucky to have him.
> JACK. In Ryanga women are eager to have love-children. The more love-children you have, the more fortunate your household is thought to be. Have you other love-children?
> KATE. She certainly has not, Jack; and strange as it may seem to you, neither has Agnes nor Rose nor Maggie nor myself. No harm to Ryanga but you're home in Donegal now and much as we cherish love-children here they are not exactly the norm. (40-41)

While imposing the Ugandan ("pagan") ideals onto the Catholic home, Father Jack encourages Chris, restoring pride to a chapter of her life that has held shame for many years. Here Father Jack claims his role that Kate has set up for him—the role of returning dignity to the Mundy family—though in a dramatically different way than Kate, and her sisters, anticipated. Surprisingly, in this moment, Father Jack restores the sisters' self-worth by relinquishing the Catholic faith that has for so long been vital to the Mundy family and their standing in the town.

But Father Jack's small moments of restoration are not enough to bring the family out of their old habits. The play suggests that the sisters' lives are dictated by rules that

they force upon themselves. While it is true that the time-period of the play certainly influences the roles the women perform and the burdens they carry, Friel also places the characters into an environment that is closing in on them. The sisters have succumbed to the claustrophobic lives that they lead, refusing to challenge or alter their habits in order to break into a new way of living. Friel writes these restrictive elements against the backdrop of a changing time, highlighting both the fear that paralyzes the women and the impetus to cast it off.

Pas de Cinq:
the moment of rupture

"By encoding identity through movement, dance often functions as a mode of empowerment for oppressed characters."

– *Gilbert and Tompkins*[8]

Toward the end of Act One Friel utilizes the familiar technique of the moment of rupture to move the Mundy sisters out of their restricted day-to-day habits to bring them into a new freedom. *Dancing at Lughnasa* offers a new definition of the moment of rupture in two important ways: first, the experience is communal in that the moment is experienced by five women together; and second, the moment is without verbal language and located in the body through the dramatic language of dance. This famous moment in Friel's theatre not only provides the title of the play, but (like his other moments of rupture) it is also a critical moment in the play's story. Within *Dancing at Lughnasa* the moment of rupture alters the lives of the sisters so dramatically that while freeing them from their fear and self-imposed restrictive habits, it forces them into a new way of

[8] *Post-Colonial Drama: theory, practice, politics*, pp. 40.

living, simultaneously destroying their current family structure and offering a chance at healing.

Dancing at Lughnasa's moment of rupture occurs in the Mundy kitchen just after the sisters have been discussing the festival of Lughnasa that looms in the background of the play. After Kate aggressively informs her sisters that they would not be attending the dance, they begin reminiscing about their pasts, displaying their longing for a simpler time. Maggie describes when she and her friend Bernie went to a dance with two men to compete in a dance competition in another town. As Maggie gets lost in her memory and her story trails off, Friel writes a specific direction for the actors to convey the mood he desires. "*Maggie stands motionless, staring out of the window, seeing nothing. The others drift back to their tasks: Rose and Agnes knit; Kate puts the groceries away; Chris connects the battery*" (Friel 20). As music fills the room Chris "*returns to her ironing*" (21), and the famous dance scene ensues. One by one the women enter the dance, each experiencing her own moment of rupture in which she is released from her enveloping trauma and moved from her past to her present. During the dance each sister is freed from the expectations that have been placed upon her, freed from the gendered tasks and roles she has been performing throughout the play, and finally freed to express herself in the language best suited for her own experience. For these sisters, that language is dance. "Dance is the world out of time when the body, freed from labor, care, and responsibility of daily life can express itself openly" (Garrett 85). The dance is a chance for the women to express their trauma and experience a new awareness of their lives.

First Maggie gives into the music emanating from the wireless radio and begins to dance. In her moment of rupture she "pulls her hands down her cheeks and patterns her

face with an instant mask" (35). As Maggie releases herself from the domestic task of baking, she also marks herself with the flour, a reminder of what she has left behind. Each character in turn throws aside her gendered duties to immerse herself into a language not bound by the home. The space is transformed from kitchen to dance hall and the women's obligations are removed. Friel is specific in his stage directions about the women and how they should enter into the dance. He writes:

> *Then Rose's face lights up. Suddenly she flings away her knitting, leaps to her feet, shouts, grabs Maggie's hand. ... Now after another five seconds Agnes looks around, leaps up, joins Maggie and Rose. ... Then after the same interval Chris, who's been folding Jack's surplice, tosses it quickly over her head and joins in the dance. ... Finally Kate, who has been watching the scene with unease, with alarm, suddenly leaps to her feet, flings her head back, and emits a loud 'Yaaaah!'* [9] (35-36)

The women do not just enter the dance space, they leap; they do not just set down their duties, they throw them aside. As they stomp their feet, the women enter a pagan-like state, released from the restrictions of their Catholic faith. Eventually the five sisters join in together, abandoning their reminiscing, their duties of the home, and their strict faith to experience a communal moment of rupture.

This moment of rupture has been described as one of the most powerful moments for a female on the Irish stage. Its strength comes from the lack of language used, an ironic twist for the playwright most commonly praised for his poetic prose. But in silence these female characters find their strength. The moment suggests that the frustration of the women and their freedom from their oppressors can *only* be expressed through the movement of the body. It is as though words are not enough. Theatre scholar Jones describes this choice saying:

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[9] Friel's description of the dance sequence is printed in its entirety as an appendix at the end of this chapter.

> [Friel] is also intent on creating a theatrical expression which goes beyond language, and there is no doubt that the play's greatest moments are wordless. The magnificent dance sequence early in the first act, in which the sisters abandon themselves to 'Marconi's voodoo', is matchless in its eloquence and vitality, and the genuine excitement it generates. (156)

While speaking in a graduate seminar in 2004, Marie-Louise O'Donnell, an Irish theatre professor and theatre practitioner, echoed Jones while she spoke about her experience as an audience member at the premiere of the play. O'Donnell cried as she spoke of the power of the dance. She suggested the women onstage were dancing for the women of Ireland. As she described it, flour was spread across the stage, marking the kitchen territory while simultaneously releasing the women from their confinement as they discard the food they work so hard to purchase and use. O'Donnell saw the play in the Abbey Theatre in 1990, yet was brought to tears fourteen years later as she spoke of the importance of that dance for Irish women.

The use of dance to express freedom onstage is not a new phenomenon. Authors of *Post-Colonial Drama*, Joanne Gilbert and Helen Tompkins, write "In many cases, transformations of the post-colonial body are theatricalised through rhythmic movement such as dance, which brings into focus the performing body" (239). The Mundy sisters are these women who through dance experience a transformation. The rhythmic nature of the dance brings the transformation to the forefront of the stage, emphasizing the physical expression of emotion. Gilbert and Tompkins further describe the transformation nature of dance saying:

> As a culturally coded activity, dance has a number of important functions in drama: not only does it concentrate the audience's gaze on the performing body/bodies, but it also draws attention to proxemic relations between characters, spectators, and features of the set. (239)

The moment of rupture in *Dancing at Lughnasa* certainly draws attention to the relationship among the characters, not only among the sisters (even though they are brought together by their communal moment of freedom), but also their relationships with the men in the home. Although specific in his writing of the scene Friel leaves out one key point that has been debated by theatre artists and scholars: does Michael witness the moment of rupture?

Some argue yes; Michael must witness the dance scene as he is the narrator. Murray agrees saying, "The dance is not, cannot be allowed to be, simply natural. Its meaning is filtered through the mind of Michael, who knows how much conflict there is between the image of the dance as joyous and the actuality of the sisters' doomed lives" (*Twentieth-Century Irish Drama* 227).

There is, however, reason to suggest that the narrator should not be onstage while the women actually experience their momentary freedom. Friel's meticulous stage directions never specify that Michael should be onstage the entire time, nor do they state that Michael should be present during the moment of rupture. I argue that the narrator should *not* be onstage during the moment of rupture—a choice which heightens the freedom the women experience in their theatrical dance. In this case the freedom then would not be just from their domestic roles, or from the trauma of their experience, but from the male gaze. Without the male actor onstage the moment is purely female and the symbolism of the feminine experience translates in a way that would be lost if performed

otherwise.[10]

The female dance is the first taste of freedom for these women, the first time they have been able to cast aside their domestic obligations. In this moment the women respond to Kate's earlier comment. "Mature women dancing?" she asked, "This is Father Jack's home" (25). As they dance the women break through gender stereotypes, through their own self-imposed guidelines, to reclaim the home as theirs. They *are* mature women, dancing to discover a new identity.

Although the moment of rupture is the first freedom, it is also the instigating moment for the destruction of their lives as they know them. "Although the dance of the Mundy sisters is simultaneously celebratory and defiant, it also becomes the ominous indicator of impending separation" (Jordan "Metatheatricalisation of Memory" 2). This moment of rupture is the culmination of the family experience and, as such, after the dance the women are left with no choice but to step away from one another. Having forced their trauma out into the open, the sisters must evaluate the extent of their trauma. While the action of the play before the moment of rupture focuses on who and what the sisters need freedom from, the remainder of the play examines how the catalytic nature of the freedom realized in the dancing causes the breakdown of the current state of that family.

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[10] In the 1998 film made of the play, Michael, Gerry, and Father Jack all witness the dance scene. This choice cheapens the experience for the women and I believe is not true to the characters since many of the women would not dare to enter into such a dance with men watching. The film also changes the placement of the dance in the story's timeline, moving it to the end. In a 2006 production of *Dancing at Lughnasa* in Chula Vista, CA, the director *began* the play with a dance not only with the women but with all the characters including Gerry, Michael, and Father Jack. Beginning the play in such a manner weakened the dance that occurred later and the moment of rupture was lost.

Adagio:
the slow transition out of their lives

Upon completion of the dance, the women return to their domestic tasks. The space resumes its natural identity as the kitchen, and the Mundy home seems as before. But the play is haunted by the dance as if the sisters' world has been shattered. Murray articulates this challenge for the characters, saying, "reintegration is not an option that the play provides. On the contrary, it dramatizes disintegration" ("Recording Tremors" 37).

At first the women attempt reintegration, but, in Friel-ian fashion, they find that a return to pre-rupture life is not possible. Kate renews her efforts to install Father Jack as both head of the church and as the head of the home, hoping he will reinforce their household roles and restore order. Yet Father Jack rejects these positions, refusing to say mass and teaching the sisters his new ideas about women and motherhood. This devastates Kate, but forces her to confront reality. In a conversation with Maggie after the rupture, Kate admits that Father Jack is plagued by more than a confused mind; he has given up his faith. She tells Maggie in confidence:

> And the doctor says he doesn't think Father Jack's mind is confused but that his superiors had probably no choice but to send him home. Whatever he means by that, Maggie. And the parish priest did talk to me today. He said that numbers in the school are falling and that there may not be a job for me after the summer. But the numbers aren't falling, Maggie. Why is he telling me lies? Why does he want rid of me? And why has he never come out to visit Father Jack? (Friel 35 – 36)

The passage indicates that Jack was sent home from Uganda because he was no longer Catholic, and that Kate will lose her job at the school because of it. Because Kate provided the main source of income for the Mundy family, her job loss means ruin for the sisters. Jack's arrival into the home brought with it not the anticipated security and

patriarchy, but confusion and destruction. Kate's loss of identity as teacher banishes her to the home and she must find a new place there. As she puts it, "If he gives me the push, all five of us will be at home together all day long" (36).

As Marconi foreshadowed at the beginning of the play, modernization is the other element that brings about the disintegration of the family. Although Rose and Agnes had not made much money from their knitting, it was enough to help out the family. And so their gendered roles within the home were also a source of income. Although modernization brings the music that led the women to dance, the same trend of modernization quickly becomes a curse to Rose and Agnes. In a soliloquy, Michael explains how this element dramatically alters the family's state.

> The following night Vera McLaughlin arrived and explained to Agnes and Rose why she couldn't buy their hand-knitted gloves any more. Most of her home knitters were already working in the new factory and she advised Agnes and Rose to apply immediately. The Industrial Revolution had finally caught up with Ballybeg. They didn't apply, even though they had no mean of making a living, and they never discussed their situation with their sisters… Perhaps the two of them just wanted … away. Anyhow, on my first day back at school, when we came into the kitchen for breakfast, there was a note propped up against the milk jug: 'We are gone for good. This is best for all. Do not try to find us.' It was written in Agnes's resolute hand. (59-60 Friel's ellipses)

Modernization proves devastating for the family. Not allowed to knit anymore, Agnes and Rose find their domestic tasks, their identities (and their income), taken away from them, ending their connection to the home. Agnes and Rose move to London, never to return to Ireland. Interestingly, Agnes and Rose move out of Ireland to London in order to escape colonial oppression. They choose to live in the present and look toward the future, rather than stagnate in nostalgia and oppression. Their exit out of Ireland is historically plausible; in the early 1900s, "faced with poor marriage prospects and

virtually no employment opportunities, increasingly large numbers of women left rural Ireland" (Owens 171). After Rose and Agnes leave, the Mundy body is left ripped apart, forced to dramatically change its functions to move out of the trauma that trapped the women, propelling them into the reality of their present.

The family that the audience encounters at the beginning of the play is dramatically altered by the end; the crucial turning point is clearly the moment of rupture. While the moment of rupture brings freedom from the binds that held the women for so long, it also produces a realization that they can never return to their previous state. By the end of the play Agnes and Rose have left, and Kate, Maggie, and Chris are irreversibly changed. Only a year after returning home Jack dies of a heart attack and, as Michael articulates, "my mother and Maggie mourned him sorely. But for months Kate was inconsolable" (Friel 61). With his death, and with Rose and Agnes's absence, "the heart seemed to go out of the house" (70). In his last soliloquy Michael describes the family and home after these gaping holes formed saying:

> Maggie took on the tasks Rose and Agnes had done and pretended to believe that nothing had changed. My mother spent the rest of her life in the knitting factory – and hated every day of it. And after a few years of doing nothing Kate got the job of tutoring the young family of Austin Morgan of the Arcade. But much of the spirit and fun had gone out of their lives. (71)

Theatre scholar Ashley Taggart writes about the play, "We watch the destruction of the household with a sense of horrified fascination. *Dancing at Lughnasa* is, primarily, a domestic tragedy." (73) The household does crumble before our eyes because of the moment of rupture. But although Friel's *Dancing at Lughnasa* ends with a sense of sadness for the women, the consequences of their freedom are not *entirely* negative.

While the play certainly is tragic as the women are separated from one another, hope arises out of their progression forward. No longer are the sisters trapped in a life where nostalgia, gendered domestic roles, and adherence to a non-existent patriarchy defined them. They have stopped waiting for a man to take charge and have accepted that they are on their own and responsible for their own destiny. Their lives, while hard and bleak, are at least rooted in the present and through that present state the sisters might begin to heal from the wounds that defined and carried them for the majority of their lives. Friel's message of the play arises out of this realization: although our present might be painful, it is only by living in that present that we can move beyond our binding bars of trauma to a new awareness and begin the healing process. Friel's own act of writing this play, his dance of words, has the potential to lead to constructive change for his fellow Irish.

Appendix

She switches the set on and returns to her ironing. The music, at first scarcely audible, is Irish dance music – 'The Mason's Apron', played by a ceili band. Very fast; very heavy beat; a raucous sound. At first we are aware of the beat only. Then, as the volume increases slowly, we hear the melody. For about ten seconds – until the sound has established itself – the women continue with their tasks. Then Maggie turns round. Her head is cocked to the beat, to the music. She is breathing deeply, rapidly. Now her features become animated by a look of defiance, of aggression; a crude mask of happiness. For a few seconds she stands still, listening absorbing the rhythm, surveying her sisters with her defiant grimace. Now she spreads her fingers (which are covered with flour), pushes her hair back from her face, pulls her hands down her cheeks and patterns her face with an instant mask. At the same time she opens her mouth and emits a wild raucous 'Yaaaah!' –and immediately begins to dance, arms, legs, hair, long bootlaces flying. And as she dances she lilts—sings—shouts and calls, 'Come on and join me! Come on! Come on!' For about ten seconds she dances along – a white-faced, frantic dervish. Her sisters watch her.

Then Rose's face lights up. Suddenly she flings away her knitting, leaps to her feet, shouts, grabs Maggie's hand. They dance and sing—shout together; Rose's wellingtons pounding out their own erratic rhythm. Now after another five seconds Agnes looks around, leaps up, joins Maggie and Rose. Of all the sisters she moves most gracefully, most sensuously. Then after the same interval Chris, who has been folding Jack's surplice, tosses it quickly over her head and joins in her dance. The moment she tosses the vestment over her head Kate cries out in remonstration, 'Oh, Christina - !' But her protest is drowned. Agnes and Rose, Chris and Maggie, are now all doing a dance that is almost recognizable. They meet – they retreat. They form a circle and wheel round and round. But the movements seem caricatured; and the sound is too loud; and the beat is too fast; and the almost recognizable dance is made grotesque because – for example – instead of holding hands, they have their arms tightly around one another's neck, one another's waist. Finally Kate, who has been watching the scene with unease, with alarm, suddenly leaps to her feet, flings her head back, and emits a loud 'Yaaaah!'

Kate dances alone, totally concentrated, totally private; a movement that is simultaneously controlled and frantic; a weave of complex steps that takes her quickly round the kitchen, past her sisters, out to the garden, round the summer seat, back to the kitchen; a pattern of action that is out of character and at the same time ominous of some deep and true emotion. Throughout the dance Rose, Agnes, Maggie and Chris shout – call – sing to each other. Kate makes no sound.

With this too loud music, this pounding beat, this shouting – calling – singing, this parodic reel, there is a sense of order being consciously subverted, of the women consciously and crudely caricaturing themselves, indeed of near-hysteria being induced. The music stops abruptly in mid-phrase. But because of the noise they are making the sisters do not notice and continue dancing for a few seconds. Then Kate notices – and stops. Then Agnes. Then Chris and Maggie. Now only Rose is dancing her graceless dance by herself. Then finally she, too, notices and stops. Silence. For some time they stand where they have stopped. There is no sound but their gasping for breath and short

bursts of static from the radio. They look at each other obliquely; avoid looking at each other; half smile in embarrassment; feel and look slightly ashamed and slightly defiant. Chris moves first. She goes to the radio (Friel 21 – 22).

CHAPTER FOUR

"THEY'RE MUCH MORE PURE, MY PEOPLE" [1]: FRIEL IN CONTEXT

When comparing Friel against other Irish playwrights, many scholars focus on Friel's contemporaries, particularly Tom Murphy. Such comparisons are interesting, especially considering the criticism of Murphy's female characterizations. Indeed, Murphy has not been alone in his less than desirable portrayals of females. As Anthony Roche notes:

> Contemporary Irish drama has all too often been an exclusive men's club. Women were either barred or at best palmed off with associate membership in being portrayed as adolescent halfwits or mercenary or marriage-minded trollops. (147)

Murphy in particular received enormous criticism from scholars and critics because of the blandness of the female characters in his plays. Recalling a conversation with an audience member after a performance of his *A Whistle in the Dark* in 1962, Murphy admitted, "A woman came up to me after the play, and she said it was very good, and so on, but 'if you don't mind, Tom, you know nothing about women'" (qtd. in Roche 147).

The contrast between Friel's and Murphy's representation of women has been well established in academic circles, and so here I extend this comparison beyond Friel's immediate contemporaries. This chapter situates Friel in a larger context by comparing him to three significant Irish playwrights: one from a previous generation, Oscar Wilde; one male from a younger generation, Martin McDonagh; and one female from a younger generation, Marina Carr. The playwrights are selected because of their impact not only in

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[1] Friel, Brian. *Making History*, pp. 313.

Ireland but also on the worldwide stage. Wilde, one of Ireland's literary heroes, wrote in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. A statue of him stands at the entrance of Dublin's Merrion Square Park, a tribute to his contribution to Ireland's history. McDonagh, Ireland's "bad-boy" playwright, gained global recognition with his play *The Pillowman* and has surprised audiences with his gruesome yet comedic writing. Carr is Ireland's most famous contemporary female playwright. Her plays are produced around the world, telling stories of Ireland's darker side.

By comparing Friel with Wilde, McDonagh, and Carr, I place Friel within a tradition of Irish drama and evaluate the evolution of the representation of the female onstage. Wilde, McDonagh, and Carr are prestigious playwrights whose works merit study and have been the subject of many books, and who cannot be discussed in full in a single chapter. This chapter will therefore focus only on one play by each author. The chapter will examine Wilde's *Lady Windermere's Fan* (1892), McDonagh's *The Lieutenant of Inishmore* (2001), and Carr's *By the Bog of Cats…*(1998). I choose to focus on these plays for varying reasons. *Lady Windermere's Fan*, while not Wilde's most famous play, certainly is in line with the rest of his work. His focus on the female and her transformation in a Victorian setting is evident in the majority of his plays. *Lady Windermere's Fan* is particularly intriguing because a disease, known as Lady Windermere's Syndrome, is named after the title character. I find the disease to be improperly named and a later discussion of the female character will demonstrate why. *The Lieutenant of Inishmore* was selected in part because of its recent production on Broadway and the attention it garnered McDonagh. Although his female characterizations differ slightly from play to play, McDonagh consistently falls short of

providing his female characters with voice and/or compelling stories. *The Lieutenant of Inishmore*, therefore, represents his larger body of work in this manner. *By the Bog of Cats…* is Carr's most famous and most widely produced play. As is the case in most of Carr's work, the leading female figure in the play lacks strength, leaving her female audiences without a heroine to follow.

This chapter discusses the three plays to place Friel in a continuum of Irish playwrights, emphasizing the strength and uniqueness of his female characters. Friel draws from Wilde's less-than-overt feminist representation, pushing the female story into the forefront of Friel's plays. This exploration also demonstrates that the younger generation of Irish playwrights have not followed Friel's example in writing powerful female characters. In placing Friel in this context, I argue that he stands out among Irish artists because of his unique approach of depicting the trauma of the Irish female while offering a chance for healing through the moment of rupture. His unique approach to writing is further evidence for the importance of his work and how vital it is to explore his female representations.

Wilde and His Radical Women

Despite the societal strictures placed on him, Wilde offered feminist perspectives in his plays at the turn of the century. Wilde was a hero of the country, and he stood out among his peers in his progressive ideals about women's issues. In his book *Revising Wilde: Society and Subversion in the Plays of Oscar Wilde*, Sos Eltis writes of Wilde's feminist sympathies saying:

> Wilde's feminism is one of the least commonly recognized aspects of his progressive politics. Wilde was, however, a consistent champion of

> women's rights both in his life and his work, supporting all the primary demands of late nineteenth-century feminism. (7)

Wilde's feminist ideals were manifested in various aspects of his life, notably through his editorship of *Women's World*, a magazine which Wilde helped turn into an intellectual journal. Before Wilde accepted the position of editor to the then-called *Lady's World*, he expressed his opinion of the magazine in an 1887 letter to the director of Cassell's Publishing Company:

> I am very anxious that you should make a final appeal… to alter the name of the magazine… from *Lady's World* to the *Women's World.* The present name of the magazine has a certain taint of vulgarity about it that will always militate against the success of the new issues, and it is also extremely misleading. It is quite applicable to the magazine in its present state; it will not be applicable to a magazine that aims at being the organ of women of intellect, culture, and position. (To Wemyss Reid, 5 September 1887, Holland 104)

In the letter Wilde expresses a concern that he repeatedly addresses in his plays: that women not be considered less than the intellectual beings they are. This concern lies at the forefront of one of Wilde's most-produced plays, *Lady Windermere's Fan*.

Since its premiere at St. James's Theatre in New York in 1892, the influence of *Lady Windermere's Fan* has stretched beyond the theatre community. For example, the medical community has been impacted by the play, naming a disease after the title character. Lady Windermere's Syndrome, which is similar to pneumonia, typically affects older women who grew up believing it was impolite to cough in public. The disease is named after the character in Wilde's play because she is supposedly the model Victorian wife. However, this chapter posits that the disease is improperly named. A careful examination of the role of Lady Windermere will demonstrate that over the

course of the play, she progressively stands against the Victorian ideals that bound women to their homes and societal norms.

Although written by an Irish playwright, the play focuses on the story of a young English woman, Lady Windermere: a married mother of high position in 1892 London. In the first scenes of the play Lady Windermere begins to suspect her husband of adultery with Mrs. Erlynne, a woman of questionable reputation in the gossip-prone Victorian society in which they live. Lady Windermere, initially presented as a woman with a childlike mindset about “good” and “evil,” nearly leaves her husband and child to seek refuge in the arms of Lord Darlington, a man who loves her. But before her plans are discovered, she is rescued by Mrs. Erlynne, who sacrifices herself and her reputation to save Lady Windermere. To Lady Windermere this act seems entirely selfless; however, the audience learns in the final act that Mrs. Erlynne is Lady Windermere’s mother, whom Lady Windermere believes died when she was quite young. In the end Lady Windermere manages to escape not only her husband’s knowledge of her near abandonment but the Victorian ideals about propriety and goodness. As she “is made aware of her own fallibility,” she “is thereby brought to look more kindly on the sins of others” (Eltis 56).

Wilde begins the play by presenting his leading figure in her trapped identity, a technique Friel utilizes in many of his plays. Lady Windermere does not face the dual colonization that many of Friel’s Irish females do, but she is nonetheless trapped in her position in the highly structured British society. Lady Windermere is quite young, as evidenced by the main setting of the play—a party celebrating her coming of age. Wilde suggests in this decision that Lady Windermere has had to choose her ideals at a young

age, having been thrust into society early in life. At first, she subscribes to the black and white viewpoints celebrated by Victorian England (represented in the play through the comical figure the Duchess of Berwick, a gossipy woman who brings with her an air of self-importance). Lady Windermere's adherence to these ideals is witnessed early in the play when she tells Lord Darlington "Don't you *want* the world to take you seriously?" (3) and "If we had 'these hard and fast rules,' we should find life much more simple" (5). When Lord Darlington suggests she is strict with her ideas about right and wrong or good and evil, Lady Windermere agrees with him, but claims it as a good thing, calling upon her upbringing saying:

> You think I am a Puritan, I suppose? Well I have something of the Puritan in me. I was brought up like that. I am glad of it. My mother died when I was a mere child. I lived always with Lady Julia, my father's eldest sister, you know. She was stern to me, but she taught me, what the world is forgetting, the difference that there is between what is right and what is wrong. *She* allowed of no compromise. *I* allow of none. (3)

Wilde sets up Lady Windermere as a product of her society, a woman who is confident in the strict ideals and guidelines by which she will judge the world. And when confronted with possible "evil" occurring in her own home, Lady Windermere sticks to these ideals rather than allowing for the possibility that her husband might have an explanation for his relationship with the ill-reputed Mrs. Erlynne.

The beginning of the play frequently places Lady Windermere in scenes with the Duchess of Berwick, who has become Lady Windermere's model of the ideal woman. This is humorous because Wilde depicts the Duchess of Berwick as anything but an "ideal woman."[2] Although she understands class hierarchy and can quickly articulate any

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[2] Wilde appreciates the ironic depiction of the "ideal" as demonstrated in his play *An Ideal Husband*.

rule of etiquette to anyone who will listen, the Duchess of Berwick becomes almost a caricature of the "Victorian gossip prone woman." It is the Duchess who first tells Lady Windermere of Mrs. Erlynne's relationship with Lord Windermere. Although Lady Windermere does not believe her at first, the Duchess of Berwick assures her, saying "But it's quite true, my dear. The whole of London knows it. That is why I felt it was better to come and talk to you" (8). After convincing Lady Windermere of Lord Windermere's wanderings, the Duchess of Berwick feels that she has done her duty and concludes their conversation with the following exchange:

> DUCHESS OF BERWICK. Pretty child. … Now I know that all men are monsters. The only thing to do is to feed the wretches well. … My dear Margaret, you are not going to cry?
> LADY WINDERMERE. You needn't be afraid, Duchess, I never cry.
> DUCHESS OF BERWICK. That's quite right, dear. Crying is the refuge of plain women, but the ruin of pretty ones. (9)

Here Wilde gives the audience a glimpse into the world of the "proper female" who, despite having just received news of her husband's infidelity, is expected to contain her emotions and not cry. The play depicts the Duchess of Berwick as a firm example of the type of woman Lady Windermere feels she must strive to be, despite the absurdity of the Duchess's behavior.

Although Lady Windermere initially refuses to believe that her husband has been unfaithful, she eventually decides to investigate—a course of action outside the rules for a proper wife. Lady Windermere proves that she does not always maintain decorum by breaking into her husband's desk to look at his files, only to discover that her husband has been paying Mrs. Erlynne for the past several months. Appalled and shocked, Lady Windermere confronts her husband, who denies the affair and instead insists that they

invite Mrs. Erlynne to their party that evening. In a powerful moment Lady Windermere stands up to her husband, showing her strength by telling him that she will not welcome Mrs. Erlynne into her home. The conversation continues:

> LORD WINDERMERE. Child, if you did such a thing, there's not a woman in London who wouldn't pity you.
> LADY WINDERMERE. There is not a *good* woman in London who would not applaud me. We have been too lax. We must make an example. I propose to begin to-night. *(Picking up fan.)* Yes, you gave me this fan to-day; it was your birthday present. If that woman crosses my threshold, I shall strike her across the face with it. (13)

Although still advocating "societal good," Lady Windermere has begun to break out of the stereotypical feminine gender role, standing up to her husband for what she believes to be just and good. In this moment Lady Windermere demonstrates her ability to defy etiquette to maintain her morals, black and white though they still may be.

As the play continues, however, Lady Windermere's façade of "perfection" begins to collapse as the world she has known appears to crumble around her. When Lady Erlynne shows up to the ball, Lady Windermere restrains herself, but it becomes apparent that she is nearing a breakthrough, or a break out of her identity as the supposed perfect Victorian wife. In a poignant scene that demonstrates Lady Windermere's confusion, Lord Darlington offers Lady Windermere his heart and life, telling her, "Take it, and do with it what you will…" (22). He encourages her to leave her unfaithful husband and to "Be brave! Be yourself!" (23). Lady Windermere's response speaks of her uncertainty about her life and identity; she says, "I am afraid of being myself. Let me think! Let me wait! My husband may return to me" (23). The line not only demonstrates Lady Windermere's sadness regarding her husband's infidelity, but her words "I am

afraid of being myself" suggest that she realizes she has merely been playing the role of the Victorian wife. The act of being herself is so foreign that she actually fears it.

Only a few minutes later Lady Windermere comes to the conclusion that to stay with her husband would be to live a life of unhappiness and decides to leave both him and her child to be with Lord Darlington. She states:

> To stay in this house any longer is impossible. To-night a man who loves me offered me his whole life. I refused it. It was foolish of me. I will offer him mine now. I will give him mine. I will go to him! *(Puts on cloak and goes to door, then turns back. Sits down at table and writes a letter, puts it into an envelope, and leaves it on table.)* Arthur has never understood me. When he reads this he will. He may do as he chooses now with his life. I have done with mine as I think best, as I think right. It is he who has broken the bond of marriage—not I. I only break its bondage. (27)

At this point it becomes obvious that Lady Windermere has broken free of society's opinions of her. After Lady Windermere leaves with the intention of never returning, Lady Erlynne finds Lady Windermere's letter to Lord Windermere and decides to intervene to prevent life from repeating its tragedies (27). Here Lady Erlynne reveals the big secret of the play, that she is Lady Windermere's mother, saying, "The same words that twenty years ago I wrote to her father! And how bitterly I have been punished for it!" (27). In order to stop Lady Windermere from committing the same mistake she had made two decades prior, Lady Erlynne goes to Lord Darlington's house to bring Lady Windermere home. Despite Lady Erlynne's attempts to get her home to her husband, Lady Windermere refuses, stating:

> Go back to my husband, Mrs. Erlynne. He belongs to you and not to me. I suppose he is afraid of a scandal. Men are such cowards. They outrage every law of the world and are afraid of the world's tongue. But he had better prepare himself. He shall have a scandal. He shall have the worst scandal there has been in London for years. He shall see his name in every vile paper, mine on every hideous placard. (30)

Although Lady Windermere eventually agrees to go home to her husband (without ever telling Lord Darlington of her plan), her previous line demonstrates her freedom from the rules of society. While the beginning of the play presents a woman consumed by conforming to the norms set by societal gossip and appearance, this scene suggests a breaking from those norms to the point where Lady Windermere is willing to create a scandal.

Lady Erlynne saves Lady Windermere from the consequences of this new rashness. Lady Windermere consents to return home only after Lady Erlynne has pleaded with her to do so, if not for her husband, then for her child saying, “He has never swerved for a moment from the love he bears you. But even if he had a thousand loves, you must stay with your child” (33). A group of men (Lord Darlington, Lord Windermere, and Lord Augustus who has agreed to marry Lady Erlynne despite her reputation) enter the scene, forcing the women into hiding. The men discover Lady Windermere’s forgotten fan and to save Lady Windermere from public disgrace, Lady Erlynne steps out of the shadows and claims it, giving up her chance at a marriage with Lord Augustus, and again placing her reputation at stake. This self-sacrifice allows Lady Windermere to escape and return home undetected.

The final act of the play takes place at Lord and Lady Windermere’s home the next morning, where Lady Windermere chastises Arthur for calling Lady Erlynne a “bad woman.” In one line Lady Windermere contradicts her earlier notions of good and evil to reveal both her renunciation of societal etiquette and her expansion of the definition of “good” and “evil”:

> Arthur, Arthur, don't talk so bitterly about any woman. I don't think now that people can be divided into the good and the bad, as though they were two separate races or creations. What are called good women may have terrible things in them, mad moods of recklessness, assertion, jealousy, sin. Bad women, as they are termed, may have in them sorrow, repentance, pity, sacrifice. And I don't think Mrs. Erlynne a bad woman—I know she's not. (42-43)

In the end Lady Erlynne convinces Lady Windermere never to reveal her previous night's plans to her husband. And although the audience (and Lord Windermere) knows of her relationship to Lady Windermere, Lady Erlynne never reveals it to her daughter, deciding it best to not tarnish Lady Windermere's idea of her mother "watching over her from above." The play not only demonstrates a stepping away from Victorian propriety, but also reveals its true heroine to be the figure whose reputation is the most questionable. *Lady Windermere's Fan* reveals the idleness of gossip while bringing two female characters into their own.

As a precursor to Friel, Wilde comments on the impact of social norms upon a woman's identity but allows his leading lady to break out of societal bonds to enter into a new understanding of her self. This development first demonstrates the problem with the naming of Lady Windermere's Syndrome, because Lady Windermere's journey through the play moves her *away* from the propriety of the stereotypical Victorian woman. In addition, Wilde sets the stage for Friel to introduce his own technique of the moment of rupture to move his own characters, and guide his audiences, to a new understanding and awareness of self.

McDonagh's Easily Swayed Youthful Female

In the summer of 2006 Martin McDonagh's *The Lieutenant of Inishmore* (a Tony nominee for Best Play) played at the Lyceum Theatre on Broadway to critical acclaim.

Audiences flocked to see McDonagh's dark comedy about the repercussions of extreme terrorism in Ireland. The play, staged down the road from the more highly publicized *Faith Healer* by Brian Friel, offered an alternate glance at Irish theatre. The plays are drastically different: Friel's is a series of soliloquies with only three characters who never interact with one another and offers a bleak view of Ireland's past; McDonagh's follows a straight-forward, dialogue-driven structure. Where Friel's play requires audiences to ease into the unique format, McDonagh's comedic satire draws audiences in from its first moments. I attended productions of both *The Faith Healer* and *Lieutenant of Inishmore*[3] on consecutive days. I found myself mesmerized by Friel's poetic, harsh depiction of Ireland. At McDonagh's *Lieutenant of Inishmore* I laughed along with the dialogue while simultaneously being disturbed by the way I, and others, were so easily humored by bloody torture onstage. While my impressions of the productions may not be representative of the average audience member, my observation of the audiences' responses provides anecdotal evidence of the contrasting nature of the plays.

Sitting in the audience at Friel's play, not all patrons were captivated by the poetic language and simplicity of the performance. As I read the program notes and waited for the curtain to rise, I heard comments on the small size of the cast; it was then that I realized that the majority of this audience might not know what they had signed up for—two hours of soliloquies. I forgave those around me whose heads nodded with sleep while trying to watch Friel's production; it is not easy to listen to soliloquies without any real

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[3] *Lieutenant of Inishmore*: 1 July 2006; *Faith Healer*: 2 July 2006.

interaction for an entire play if not prepared for it.[4] While the format of *Faith Healer* demonstrates Friel's unique sensibility as a playwright, a quality not missed by reviewers, some audience members, not accustomed to the poetic style and structural simplicity, struggled through the play.

The mood at *The Lieutenant of Inishmore* was dramatically different. Audience members roared with laughter while watching the shocking images appearing onstage. At intermission, rather than rushing to grab coffee, audience members repeated humorous lines and replayed the scenes for one another. These two experiences began my comparison of the two plays and playwrights. McDonagh's *Lieutenant of Inishmore* succeeded in the feat of entertaining audiences with ease. But I argue that it failed in another area, that of the representation of the female.

McDonagh, born in 1970, comes from a different generation of playwrights and audience members than Friel. He has for some time evaded classification; scholars wrestle with his writings and find him to be caught between the typical and the extreme: "McDonagh's writing thus finds itself in a very peculiar position: his drama is popular simultaneously because it is canonical and because it is radical. However, others dismiss his drama precisely because it is too canonical, or too radical" (Vandevelde 293). This tension between canonical and radical has become a defining characteristic of McDonagh's work. He sets his plays in idyllic rural Ireland, yet litters them with

[4] The theatre community as a whole embraced the play; Ian McDiarmid won a Tony for his representation of Teddy (one of the three characters), and the play certainly received more than its share of rave reviews. But for many audience members, who perhaps thought they were getting the opportunity of a lifetime to watch the famous Ralph Fiennes perform live, I believe the show was too quiet, slow, and undoubtedly overwhelming. This is not *Spamalot* nor is it *The Producers*, and many people seemed disappointed by the lack of flash and comedy.

violence, bloodshed, foul language, and dark humor. Eventually, critics classified his work—In-Yer-Face—and it is in this style that McDonagh's plays found a home.

Born in London to Irish parents, McDonagh has always identified with his Irish roots, but his plays undeniably come from the British-led form of theatre that Aleks Sierz named In-Yer-Face Theatre. Though not always popular, In-Yer-Face plays take their name from their tendency to shock audiences with onstage action that previously has been hidden or implied. Sierz elaborates:

> How can you tell if a play is in-yer-face? It really isn't difficult: the language is usually filthy, characters talk about unmentionable subjects, take their clothes off, have sex, humiliate each another [sic], experience unpleasant emotions, become suddenly violent. … It's the kind of theatre that inspires us to use superlatives, whether in praise or condemnation. (5)

From Sarah Kane's *Blasted* to Mark Ravenhill's *Shopping and Fucking*, In-Yer-Face Theatre notoriously holds nothing back. This definition holds true for *The Lieutenant of Inishmore*, which ends with bloodied body parts flung about the stage. And so, though the language might be less than poetic [one of the more famous lines from the play reads "Fecking wee fecking Thomas; that's who the feck it is!" (McDonagh 54)],[5] the play certainly holds the attention of audience members who flock to see it. But In-Yer-Face or not, popular or not, the play has its problems. One of these is the female character whose contrite and poorly-motivated passion makes her uninteresting or, worse, entirely forgettable. This problem is in fact exacerbated by the In-Yer-Face style as McDonagh uniquely aims for the laughs rather than wrestling with the idea of the oppressed female with whom he toys throughout the play.

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[5] "Fecking" translates to "Fucking." McDonagh writes the dialect into his plays, both as a guide for his actors and a cue that this play is specifically "Irish" in every aspect.

Like Friel's *The Freedom of the City*, *The Lieutenant of Inishmore* has a large cast of men with only one female character. Unlike Friel, McDonagh has been criticized for his flat characters (Sierz 225). This holds true for *The Lieutenant of Inishmore*, most notably in his female character, sixteen-year-old Mairead. A disappointing character, she seems to be included in the story for the sole purpose of serving the male characterizations. While the play certainly is not about the female character nor does it wrestle with issues of gender, as was the case with Lily in *The Freedom of the City*, the fact that Mairead is the only female onstage draws attention to her sex, making it nearly impossible to ignore the simplistic gender relations occurring onstage.

Although McDonagh attempts to give Mairead a sense of independence and power (she wields a gun the first time the audience encounters her), she is simply a young woman haunted by small rural living and a rebel love. In the end, Mairead changes her identity in order to gain her lover's affection. And while she gains the upper hand when she kills her lover out of rage, the actions seem trite. I explore the characterization of Mairead in order to illustrate the sad trajectory of the disempowerment of women on the Irish stage, a trajectory which demonstrates both Friel's uniqueness and (unfortunately) his lack of influence (in this area of writing) for future generations of Irish playwrights.

The second play in McDonagh's Aran trilogy,[6] *The Lieutenant of Inishmore* explores life on the small Aran Island of Inishmore in 1993. The action of the play begins when Davey, Mairead's elder brother, finds on the side of the road a dead cat which he thinks is Wee Thomas. Wee Thomas lives with a neighbor, Donny, but belongs to

[6] The first in the trilogy is *The Cripple of Inishmaan*, which to McDonagh's credit, provides slightly more interesting female characters. The third, *The Banshees of Inisheer*, is the only one of McDonagh's plays never produced as McDonagh is not satisfied with its quality.

Donny's son, Padraic, a man so violent and aggressive that he has been kicked out of the Irish National Liberation Army (INLA), an extremist group that branched off from the IRA in 1974. Padraic loves Wee Thomas, and when he is told by his father that Wee Thomas is sick, he interrupts his torture of a man to return to Inishmore to care for his ailing cat. In order to trick Padraic into thinking his cat is still alive, Donny and Davey paint Mairead's ginger cat black only to have Padraic find out and shoot the animal. After further mistaken identities, a visit from INLA members, and blood and guts being strewn about the stage, Mairead discovers that Padraic has killed her cat and kills Padraic to get even, leaving the stage covered in Padraic's blood. The play concludes with a black cat entering the house; Donny and Davey discover that Wee Thomas has been alive the entire time, and they are left with a mess of bloodied bodies to clean up.

Interspersed with this action is the development of Mariead's infatuation with Padraic. Mairead first enters the play in scene three. But instead of casually walking onstage she is introduced via a pellet shot from an air rifle that hits her brother on the cheek. He says, "Ar, ya fecker Mairead! Ya big fecker, you! You got me in the cheek there! … You could've had me fecking eye out!" to which she responds as she enters "That was the object, to have your fecking eye out. I've failed now" (18). Introduced in this manner, Mairead seems tough, but also slightly insane; why else would someone try to shoot out her brother's eye? She dresses noticeably androgynously, an obvious choice for a character who attempts to hide her femininity. McDonagh describes her appearance in the stage directions, noting that "*Mairead is a girl of sixteen or so, slim, pretty, with close-cropped hair, army trousers, white T-shirt, sunglasses*" (18). McDonagh is specific about Mairead's "masculine" appearance but also clarifies that someone who is indeed

"slim and pretty" should play the character. The description suggests that although the only female character onstage must look as if she is trying to fit in with the rest of the cast, she should be obviously different from the men. McDonagh's description implies that casting choices should both reject and subscribe to a normative standard for female aesthetics and beauty.

The next time Mairead enters the stage she is paired with Padraic, who is on his way home to see his father and his beloved Wee Thomas. The scene begins with Mairead onstage "*in lipstick and a little make-up for once*" (29) as though in anticipation for this rebel returning home. To emphasize Mairead's separation from the normally peaceful island of Inishmore and her desire to be part of something bigger, the scene opens with her singing the old Irish song "The Patriot Game."[7] As it is one of the most famous political Irish war songs, Mairead's singing of it implies her allegiance to the border campaign, even though she herself is trapped on Inishmore, far away from any fighting. Friel too uses this technique in his plays to align his characters with political issues of the time.

Mairead sings the first verse of the song alone onstage. As she finishes "…it makes us all part of the patriot game" (29), Padraic enters and McDonagh interestingly writes, "*Though she's noticed him she continues singing:* Oh my name is O'Hanlon, and I've just gone sixteen…" (29). Here Mairead asserts her prerogative to join Padraic's cause—the great rebel O'Hanlon was only sixteen, Mairead's own age. She emphasizes her age only eight lines later when she tells Padraic "I'm sixteen now. If you get me

[7] Written by Dominic Behan, member of the IRA, in 1959. The song chronicles the story of Fergal O'Hanlon who was one of the major players in the fight to be rid of the border between Northern Ireland and the Republic. O'Hanlon was killed in 1957 during the border campaign.

meaning. Haven't I grown up since?" (29). This line is the first indication that Mairead is a bit enamored with Padraic, and here begins the problematic nature of her character. It is unclear if Mairead shows an interest in Padraic because of his politics, or because of her sexual attraction to him, or perhaps both. While first introduced as a young woman who firmly believes in a united Ireland, Mairead loses her focus after Padraic enters the scene. The audience is left uncertain whether Mairead actually believes in her cause or simply puts on an act to win the affections of this rebel man.

In either case, Mairead certainly changes for Padraic. Her physical alteration, beginning with lipstick and progressing throughout the play to her wearing a dress, indicates the emotional transformation that occurs within the character. Mairead literally puts on femininity in order to gain the eye of Padraic. These actions recall Judith Butler's notion of the female replicating gender norms out of fear: "Femininity is taken on by a woman who 'wishes for masculinity,' but fears the retributive consequences of taking on the public appearing of masculinity" (66). After Padraic tells her, "We don't be letting girls in the INLA. No. Unless pretty girls" (McDonagh 31), Mairead alters her androgyny by putting on a more feminine appearance, buying into the notion that women are only as valuable as their looks.

Scene six ends with Mairead giving Padraic the message that his cat, Wee Thomas, is on the mend and that he should head home immediately to look after him. This news brings Padriac to a level of ecstasy, and although he has ignored her advances for the entire scene, he kisses Mairead—*"a kiss of thanks at first, which lengthens into something much more sensual*" (32)—before walking off with her looking after him. The kiss not only complicates the relationship between the two characters but also reinforces

the idea that Mairead's presence onstage serves the characterization of Padraic as a strong, virile man. As their relationship develops, Padraic's character becomes more complex—the audience witnesses a gentler side to the rough extremist—but the character of Mairead weakens. Again, there is no clear understanding of Mairead's intentions, and the character only serves to help develop the males around her.

Mairead's next entrance, like her first, begins with her presence in the form of a gun, emphasizing the phallic nature of such weaponry. Members of the INLA have come to kill Padraic because of his extremist views, and they take him outside in order to spare Donny the sight of his son's murder. The audience does not see what happens outside but rather only hears the conversation within Donny's home, where Donny and Davey wait to hear the single shot of Padraic's execution. Instead of hearing the sound of a handgun, the characters hear "*the unmistakable sound of the raid fire, from somewhere outside, of Mairead's air rifle*" (42). Instead of celebrating that his sister has come to save the day, Davey cries out, "Ar, not me fecking sister, now!" (42). Mairead's signature move, shooting out the eyes, has saved Padraic, as the audience discovers when the three male INLA members, Brendan, Joey, and Christy, enter into the house "*bleeding profusely from their eyes, at which they clutch and tear, blinded*" (42). Although this scene might normally bring strength to the female character, McDonagh again weakens the characterization when he writes the following dialogue:

> CHRISTY. Was it a boy or was it a girl?
> BRENDEN. It was a boy with lipstick.
> JOEY. It was a girl with no boobs, sure.
> BRENDEN. Oh, don't let me be killed by a girl, Sweet Jesus! I'll never live it down! (42)

Here McDonagh again calls attention to the androgyny of Mairead. The men cannot classify her and struggle to define her gender. Interestingly even in her androgyny she is still sexualized: "It was a girl with no boobs, sure." Joey defines her against her "boobs" (not breasts), calling attention to this aspect of the actor's body and highlighting her feminine "lack."

When Mairead and Padraic do enter, the stage gives way to the sexual tension between the two figures that McDonagh carefully writes into his text. Although the main action occurs when Padraic (not Mairead—Brenden does get his wish) kills the three INLA members, the scene explores the growing sexuality expressed between Mairead and Padraic. Capitalizing on In-Yer-Face sensibility, McDonagh has the couple obviously turned-on by the violence around them: "*They move behind Brendan and, with Mairead caressing the muscles in [Padraic's] back and shoulders, Padraic puts both guns up to Brendan's head and fires, killing him instantly*" (43). Once the killing has stopped, Padraic and Mairead kiss again in a passionate and sexualized manner.

The scene ends with more ambiguity surrounding the character of Mairead. When Christy reveals himself as still being alive and admits to killing Wee Thomas, Padraic determines that death by shooting is not enough and instead decides to torture him. He calls out to Mairead "Bring a knife, a cheese grate, a razor, an iron and anything to gag the screaming, Mairead," ordering her around in a true patriarchal manner. To which Mairead eagerly responds, "Check, Lieutenant" (45). In a matter of minutes the couple turns from sexually driven beings to members of a terrorist organization where the hierarchy is clear: Padraic as the man is in charge, and Mairead as the women must follow orders.

The final scene of the play opens with a violent image: "*[T]he blood-soaked living room is strewn with the body parts of Brenden and Joey, which Donny and Davey, blood-soaked also, hack away at to sizable chunks.*" (46). In the corner Padraic sits stroking the headless corpse of his cat, which he has dug up from its grave. When Mairead enters the scene she instantly stands apart from the blood and guts wearing a "*pretty dress*" (47). Amidst the violence of the scene her dress highlights the femininity that she has been without for the rest of the play. Her brother, Davey, calls her out immediately saying, "What the hell's that you're wearing?" to which she replies, "A dress! I *do* have them!" (47). Padraic repeats Davey's line only minutes later and Mairead's motivation for wearing the dress becomes clear. She asks Padraic "Would you say I look pretty in it, or just fair now?" (48). His response, to kiss her, emphasizes Mairead's desire to change in order to be loved. Padraic maintains the upper hand in their relationship by saying "When you get up close to you, you don't really look like a boy at all. … Just except for your hair" (48). This scene emphasizes Mairead's internalization of the notion that women must conform to a certain appearance to receive the affection and attention of men.

Mairead redefines her identity throughout the play as she struggles to discern, and conform to, what is expected of her. In a unique moment Mairead stands up for herself, defending her strength as a shooter, recalling the fact that she blinded three men from sixty yards away. This strength is short-lived, however; Padraic ends the conversation by saying "Kiss me again," to which she replies, "I will" (49). McDonagh again writes ambiguity into the female character; she is "boyish" in her style and shooting abilities but desires a romantic and sexual relationship with Padraic and therefore tries to become

"feminine." In the end, she is still challenged in her failed attempt to be feminine; she is condemned to live in-between: not being male, yet being too "boyish" or "butch" to be female. Even when she stands up for herself, she is quieted with an order for a kiss. She is not allowed to be "feminine" in her assertion of power *vis-à-vis* her shooting abilities.

As the play continues, the audience is told that Mairead and Padraic will be splintering from the INLA to form a group called "Wee Thomas's Army." True to form, however, Padraic will be calling the shots and Mairead will be "second-lieutenant," as she tells her brother, "Just awarded be Padraic. Padraic's just awarded himself a full-blown lieutenantship, and he deserves it" (sic 47). The line indicates Padraic's control over the situation and relationship. Another exchange that reveals similar sentiments occurs when Padraic expresses his desire to marry Mairead "when Ireland is free!" (51). The comedic line that follows when Donny exclaims, "That'll be a long fecking engagement!" (51) emphasizes the tragedy of this unrealistic deadline. Here the real sadness of the patriarch maintaining his power over his oppressed female is lost in the comedy. Mairead and Padraic move forward in their hierarchical relationship. Unlike Friel's dramas, the play does not question this hierarchy. Rather, it continues in comedy without analysis or expression from the female character.

Mairead's final act in the play occurs when she realizes that Padraic has killed her cat. She emerges from the bathroom (where the cat was killed) to face Padraic, and for a moment she has the upper hand. While continuing to sing "The Patriot Game," she prepares to kill Padraic. In a role reversal, Mariead orders him, "Kiss me, Padraic," which he does, and she grabs his guns from beside him. Then his moment of death arrives with the following stage directions, "*She shoots Padraic in the head with both guns. …*

Mairead looks at the guns in her hands a while, as she quietly continues with the song" (53). As she continues singing "The Patriot Game," she is reminiscent of Ophelia, singing in her madness.

Mairead orders Donny and Davey to "chop up Padraic" (53), taking on Padraic rank as she yells "it's a fecking lieutenant ye're talking to now" (53). As she exits the stage, she continues her eerie singing: "My only son was shot in Dublin, fighting for his country bold. He fought for Ireland and Ireland only. The harp and shamrock, green, white, and gold" (54). Instead of returning to her identity at the beginning of the play, Mairead becomes like Padraic while mourning his death in song. Thus, the character leaves the stage more ambiguous than when she entered, and the audience is left unclear about who or what Mairead is. The female character suffers for the In-Yer-Face style. Characterization is compromised for shock value. In the end, rather than cheering for Mairead when she suddenly kills Padriac, the members of the audience watch her wander off the stage while they laugh and celebrate the fact that the two characters we care about, Donny and Davey, are left alive.

McDonagh struggles throughout the play in his definition of Mairead. Her ambiguity is her weakness. Instead of standing out for her strength, she is washed over in order to emphasize the insanity of the scenario and the intensity of the male figures around her, especially Padraic. When we examine the play through a feminist lens, the real tragedy is the undefined identity of Mairead, a point often overlooked in the chaos and comedy of the style. Unlike Friel, McDonagh seems to have no real reason for including a female character; any discussion or analysis of gender dynamics within the text is ignored and gives way to comedy, violence, and commentary on the stupidity of

extreme terrorism. But still, audiences flock to the play and laugh along with the characters, not seeing McDonagh's missed opportunity—an exploration of gendered oppression in this one female character.

Carr's Problematic Leading Lady

Although Marina Carr herself says she feels no obligation to her female readers and audience members, she is considered the most influential and popular Irish female playwright[8] since Lady Gregory. Born in 1964, she is among Ireland's younger generation of playwrights, but she writes in a drastically different style than McDonagh. However, like Friel and McDonagh, Carr wrestles with an Irish community not often presented onstage, and her play *By the Bog of Cats…* exemplifies this. Dealing with the traveling or gypsy community in Ireland, Carr translates the Medea myth into a modern-day setting, shedding light on an often not-discussed though very present group of individuals in the Irish landscape.

The play premiered at the Abbey in 1998, guided by Patrick Mason, one of Ireland's most prominent directors. *By the Bog of Cats…* marked a transition in Carr's work:

> While geopathy is synonymous with the crucial lack of accommodation of female subjectivity in each of Carr's plays in the 1990s, her most recent works are also concerned with the painful politics of location and selfhood, with an emphasis on both women and men in the rural familial setting. (Sihra 212)

By the Bog of Cats… wrestles with location and the discovery and loss of self, themes which have aided in the play's success. Carr's *By the Bog of Cats…* has been produced

[8] This classification in and of itself is problematic. Why are playwrights who are women called "female playwrights" whereas male playwrights are just called "playwrights"? That being said, I mention Carr's sex because I am making a distinction between she and McDonagh (in terms of their sex) and, here, I align Carr with Lady Gregory.

around the globe, fascinating audiences with this young playwright's unique style and sensibility. The play touches on myth and motherhood but finds its voice in a dialect often left off the Irish stage—that of the wandering Midland community of rural Ireland.

The embracing of mythical elements is a perennial aspect of Carr's work. Often praised for this quality of her theatre, "Carr radically reaches out for myth and, by so doing, reaffirms the ritualism of theatre and releases an intensity of engagement that many of the other writers are unable to lay claim to or to sustain" (Jordan "Unmasking the Myths" 243). *By the Bog of Cats…*takes place in the Irish Midlands and uses the victimization prevalent in *Medea* in order to gain recognition and sympathy from the Irish people, who themselves have known the struggle of being under British control.

It is not unusual for an Irish playwright to create a modern adaptation of a Greek play; the Greeks are present throughout the Irish canon:

> The British occupiers thought that some of the classics would offer healthy examples of the governed accepting the power of government. The Irish turned this on its head and finally used this literature in the twentieth century to feed their own subversive protests. The Irish could conceal the direct statement of their desires behind the mask of Greek tragedy. Greek tragedy in Irish hands became social critique, not only of the occupiers, but of their own comedic acquiescence or bloody squabbling among themselves. (McDonald 38)

Carr is no exception to the numerous Irish playwrights, including Friel,[9] who reference Greek plays as a means of subversively discussing politics.

While *By the Bog of Cats…*is not overt in its political agenda, social commentary is present throughout the play. As scholar Christopher Murray correctly asserts, "myth rather than politics shapes her [Carr's] narrative" (*Twentieth-Century Irish Drama* 237).

[9] Friel utilizes the Hippolytus myth in his play, *Living Quarters: After Hippolytus*.

Ultimately, Carr's adherence to the Medea myth and its characters in *By the Bog of Cats…* stifles her creativity, and leaves her leading female character with a flat representation, countering what Friel accomplishes with his plays. This demonstrates Carr's choice to move away from her predecessor's aim of bringing women's issues to the stage.

In an interview in 2006 when asked if, as a female playwright, she feels an obligation to write powerful female characters for her Irish audiences, Carr quickly responded with a strong "no." Her leading female characters illustrate this sentiment, as they are weak and submissive to oppression by the patriarchy. There are those who would disagree; the program notes for the premiere of *By the Bog of Cats…* written by Frank McGuinness, one of Ireland's most celebrated playwrights, suggest that Carr's leading female figures exude strength. He writes, "Her brave women look into the face of those that have gone before them – Medea, Hedda Gabler, Miss Julie – and they can hold their own in that tough company who took on their world and tore it to ribbons, for that was their destiny" (87). I, however, argue that the text of *By the Bog of Cats…* paints a different portrait of its main character, Hester—one who is not brave but rather held by a curse from which she refuses to break through.

While the play itself more or less adheres to Euripides's *Medea*, there are fundamental shifts in the plot. The most noticeable change comes at the end when, after killing her daughter Josie (named after Hester's dead mother), Hester kills herself as well. This aspect of the play has received the most attention from scholars: "[Hester's] solution besides vengeance is suicide with herself and her daughter. How often the Irish solution is a living suicide in drink, or other forms of self-destruction" (McDonald 22). Rather

than escaping her grief by exiting on the *deus ex machina* as Medea does, Hester instead dances with the Ghost Fancier before falling to the ground (345). Even her choice to kill Josie at the end comes only as an afterthought. Hester kills her daughter on the spur of the moment, in an act of mad passion, not rationality. Rather than deciding to sacrifice her child to hurt Carthage (the Jason figure), Hester kills her daughter because Josie happens to walk in on her as she is about to commit suicide—"because ya wanted to come, Josie" (339). Josie, in fact, begs her mother "Just take me with ya, Mam. … No, Mam, stop! I'm goin' with ya! … No, Mam. Please!" (338-39). And it is only after her pleading that Hester agrees, "Alright, alright! … I'll take ya with me, I won't have ya as I was, waitin' a lifetime for somewan to return, because they don't Josie … Close your eyes" (339). This ending is the most problematic element of Hester's characterization. But throughout the play Hester is shown without Medea's strength. This weakness in the character is evident at the beginning of the play when Carr introduces a curse that was put on Hester in her young life; this curse determines the outcome of the play and traps Hester in her position.

The play opens with Hester learning of her impending death. The opening stage direction read: "*Dawn. On the Bog of Cats. A bleak white landscape of ice and snow. Music, and a lone violin. Hester Swane trails the corpse of a black swan after her, leaving a trail of blood in the snow. The Ghost Fancier stands there watching her*" (265). Within the first two pages of the play, we learn that "it's dangerous to interfere with swans, especially black wans"[10] (266) and that the Ghost Fancier has come "ghoulin' for a woman be the name of Hester Swane" (266). The scene reveals that the Ghost Fancier

[10] "Wans" means "ones."

has arrived too early: not only is Hester still alive, but he has mistaken dawn for dusk. When Hester informs him, "It's that hour when it could be aither [sic] dawn or dusk, the light bein' so similar. But it's dawn, see there's the sun comin' up," the Ghost Fancier replies, "Then I'm too previous. I mistook this hour for dusk. A thousand apologies" (266). The Ghost Fancier's mistake reminds the audience of the narrow line between life and death. Dawn, or birth, can easily be mistaken for dusk, or death. Hester too recognizes this error and the play begins with her life marked.

At first she is distraught, yelling after the Ghost Fancier "Come back! – I can't die – I have a daughter" (267). But Hester quickly learns that the Ghost Fancier is not the only sign of her death. In scene three the most interesting female character in the play, a blind "seer" Catwoman,[11] informs Hester of her connection with the black swan and of the curse that was put on Hester when she was a child. Hester, struggling with the revelation of her impending death asks Catwoman to tell her about Hester's mother, Josie Swane, and Catwoman reveals the story of the black swan:

> Sure the night ya were born she took ya over to the black swan's lair, auld Black Wing ya've just buried there, and laid ya in the nest alongside her. And when I axed her why she'd do a thing like that with snow and ice everywhere, ya know what she says, 'Swane means swan.' 'That may be so,' says I, 'but the child'll die of pneumonia.' 'That child,' says Josie Swane, 'will live as long as this black swan, not a day more, not a day less.' (275)

So Hester's life is bound by the curse of the black swan and the arrival of the Ghost Fancier. But Carr's play offers some hope in the form of Catwoman, who warns Hester,

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[11] It is Carr's secondary female figures who stand out as strong, powerful figures, bringing depth and drama to the play as a whole. In *By the Bog of Cats…* the character of Catwoman stands apart from Carr's Hester (Medea), offering wisdom and passion to the female characters in a play which otherwise lacks this depiction. But still Catwoman does not offer strength or respite for Irish women. She is almost an allegorical figure, who comes dangerously close to a Shan Van Vocht figure, yet she does not provide freedom for or insight into the Irish female and her trauma.

"There's ways round curses. Curses only have the power ya allow them" (276). This crucial line points to an opportunity for Hester's freedom. Hester could break out of her exile, choosing life and strength rather than death, as her "destiny" seems to indicate. Here Catwoman, a Tiresias-like figure,[12] offers life for both Hester and her daughter, and as her offer comes at the beginning of the play, the audience has the awareness of this option throughout the performance.

Besides her sense of fatalism, the other aspect of the play that clearly influences the leading character's choice for death in the end is her relationship with Carthage Kilbride, the Jason figure. His name offers insight into his characterization. Carthage, an ancient city in Northern Africa and rival to Rome, was both highly powerful and extremely violent. Because its location allowed for two ports, the city grew wealthy and maintained its position as a city of advantage. But the city is also remembered for its violence. After more than one hundred years of intermittent warfare, Carthage was eventually defeated by the Romans at the end of the Punic Wars. This defeat of Carthage was incredibly brutal; it led to the phrase "Carthaginian[13] Peace," which refers to peace by complete destruction of the enemy—something *By the Bog of Cats…* alludes to at its end when the character Carthage is finally freed of Hester through her death and the death of their daughter.

In addition, Kilbride, Carthage's surname, brings with it images of the death of a maiden in white. Appropriately, the name "Kilbride" is used primarily to characterize Carthage's mother, Mrs. Kilbride, who plays the role of the insanely jealous and involved

[12] Although Tiresias is not present in *Medea*, Catwoman acts as the blind, omnipotent figure present in many Greek tragedies.
[13] Interestingly, Frank McGuinness has used the history of Carthage in one of his plays about Bloody Sunday entitled *Carthaginians.*

mother-in-law, wearing all white to Carthage's wedding to his young and not so intelligent fiancée, Caroline. But the name Kilbride is linked to Carthage as well; the name is fitting from Hester's perspective, since she has always considered herself Carthage's rightful bride, a fact emphasized as Hester also shows up to Carthage's wedding wearing *her* wedding dress.[14] In the end, Hester's love for Carthage leads to her death, as though he has killed a bride.

Like the relationship between Medea and Jason, Hester and Carthage's history is strained and chaotic. The two characters in Carr's version are not married, but they have been together for fourteen years, long enough so that the audience feels there is a responsibility of one character to the other. "Hester and Carthage have shared more than intense passion. Their bond is one of blood, of obligation and of promises" (Jordan "Unmasking the Myth 248). Hester claims that she and Carthage are linked by something beyond marriage; similarly, Jason and Medea are linked by a past in which Medea gave up everything for Jason, indicating that they have a bond stronger than fickle love. As Hester talks with Monica (the equivalent of the chorus in the play), the audience gets a first glimpse of the sacrifices that Hester made for Carthage. She says:

> There's things about me and Carthage that no one knows except the two of us. And I'm not talkin' about love. Love is for fools and children. Our bond is harder, like two rocks we are, grindin' off wan another and maybe all the closer for that. (269)

The line speaks not only to Hester's supposed bond with Carthage, but also of a secret the two figures share. This is explained later in the play as Carthage and Hester talk about the murder of Joseph, Hester's brother, and again the audience is thrust into the world of

[14] The stage is riddled with brides during the scene. Even Josie wears her first communion dress, or the dress she wears when becoming a "bride of Christ." This adds comedy but also hints that "Kilbride" implicates a large number of women.

Medea. But Carthage tries to buy his way out of this bond, giving money to Hester and telling her "There's your blood money. It's all there down to the last penny… I owe ya nothin' now, Hester Swane. Nothin'. Ya've no hold over me now" (291).

Hester is trapped in her love for a man who does not love her back. Just as the curse binds her, so do her feelings for Carthage. She feels the power of a bond she believes to be unbreakable, and problems arise when Carthage severs their ties and instead binds himself to another woman through marriage. When Carthage finally releases himself from Hester by saying, "I've not an ounce of guilt where you're concerned and whatever leftover feelin' I've had for ya as the mother of me child is gone after this display of hatred towards me" (315), Hester responds by recalling the history of Carthage's name saying, "You're lavin' me no choice but a vicious war against ya" (316).[15] She is devastated and instead of following in Medea's footsteps and killing her daughter to get back at her faithless lover, she kills herself, submitting to her curse and the pain of her lost relationship, yielding ultimate power to Carthage. The play suggests that fate wins and in *By the Bog of Cats…* this choice by the dramatist weakens the female character.

In the end, rather than breaking through the curse, rather than releasing herself from her self-imposed bonds to Carthage, rather than rupturing the metaphorical chains that bind her, Hester chooses death, giving no voice to the outcast. Indeed, her final words, spoken to herself, are meant for Carthage and tell of her love for him:

> Ya won't forget me now, Carthage, and when all of this is over or half remembered and you think you've almost forgotten me again, take a walk

[15] This dramatic decision is in line with the story of Dido from Virgil's *Aeneid.* Dido, queen of Carthage, kills herself because she has been abandoned by Aeneas. Dido's curse at her death lead to the Carthage-Roman wars.

> along the Bog of Cats and wait for a purlin' wind through your hair or a soft breath be your ear or a rustle behind ya. That'll be me and Josie ghostin' ya. (340)

Instead of Medea's last words to Jason when she tells him she killed their children "to make you feel pain" (Euripides 107), Carr's Hester stabs her daughter and herself so that Carthage will not forget her. Even in death Hester is still trying to capture Carthage, fighting for recognition and hoping to have some hold over the man who does not love her in return.

Hester falls into the arms of death, represented almost too literally by her death dance with the Ghost Fancier. Carr leaves this final scene ambiguous. Although the lines leading up to the dance suggest that Hester goes willingly to her death—she tells Ghost Fancier, "Take me away, take me away from here" to which he simply replies, "Alright, my lovely" (341)—the actual dance does not specify *how* Hester dies. The stage directions read: "*[Hester and Ghost Fancier] go into a death dance with the fishing knife, which ends plunged into Hester's heart*" (341). Carr does not specify *who* does the plunging; perhaps the audience is not meant to know either. Yet each choice offers a specific reading: if Ghost Fancier plunges the knife into Hester's heart, then the play suggests that fate is at work, and as McGuinness articulates, Hester merely follows her destiny; if Hester plunges the knife into her own heart, then she *chooses* her death. But while the ambiguity of the dance is sure to be a lovely, heartbreaking moment, the sadness of the scene comes in the knowledge that Hester does, in fact, give in to fate. Carr's main figure chooses not to break the cycle, and the choice, instead, leads to her silence.

As the oppressed outcast figure in the play, the Irish Hester is a victim not only to the people around her but to fate as well. Although this brings sympathy to her character, Carr leaves the victim without any empowerment; Hester does not overcome fate, rather she succumbs to it, leaving the audience with a sense of loss. Unlike Friel's heroines, who speak of their oppression in moments of rupture, Carr's figure silences herself, giving into her fate, opting for death rather than life. While Carr is not claiming that the Irish should surrender to their circumstances, this play sends mixed messages and leaves the audience without a true hero. In her play, Carr taps into the feeling of oppression, demanding from the audience a sense of sympathy and understanding for the main character, but then Carr abandons her audience, leaving them without a character to follow, suggesting that the only way out of oppression is death.

By examining Wilde, McDonagh, and Carr in light of Friel's representation of women, we see that Friel's depictions outshine those of his fellow Irish. Wilde's choice to subtly portray feminist issues onstage stood out in a time where feminism was harshly criticized, and Friel draws on his predecessor's strength to empower his own characters in a unique and meaningful way. But, as demonstrated through the discussions of *The Lieutenant of Inishmore* and *By the Bog of Cats…*, Ireland's current leading playwrights have not followed in Friel's footsteps in writing their female figures. Friel still leads the quest in writing powerful female characters who offer a constructive model or message, a possibility of enlightenment and change. Friel's characters give voice to those who have been left without and provide agency for the twice-colonized victims who must break through their oppression. As Friel approaches the end of his writing career new Irish

playwrights will need to pick up the torch and follow Friel's example to ensure the female story remains spoken and heard.

CONCLUSION

In July of 2003, I directed Brian Friel's *The Freedom of the City*. In order to allow more women onstage, I altered some of the roles, switching the sex from male to female. The changes were few, including the characters Cuppley and Winbourne (two of the witnesses in the trial), and the photographer who takes pictures of the dead at the beginning of the play. At the time, I did not recognize the impact of these alterations upon the story of the play. The production was a success; our small house sold out nearly every performance, and the audience response was overwhelming. Many people who attended knew very little about Bloody Sunday and the play provided them with a glimpse into that specific crisis in Ireland's history. But what the production did not provide, that the play certainly addresses, is the crisis of the Irish woman. My choices for casting overshadowed this less overt, but certainly present, narration. Now, five years later, I regret these slight changes in casting.

In 1972, the year *The Freedom of the City* was being written, Friel wrote a "Self-Portrait" in which he states:

> I look to the director and the actors to interpret that score exactly as it is written. It is not their function to amend, it is not their function to rewrite, or to cut, or to extend. It is their function, their only function – and an enormously difficult one – to interpret what is given them. (Murray *Brian Friel Essays, Diaries, Interviews: 1964-1999* 44-45)

Had I known this quote prior to directing the play, I would have maintained the casting as it was written; Friel does not make mistakes in his writing. Every choice is intentional.

The next time I direct the play I will stay true to Friel's intentions, leaving Lily as the sole female onstage.

Later, when I first began to explore Friel's female characters, I recognized the importance of his unique approach to these characters. As I delved into his plays, I continued to be inspired and grateful for this playwright who takes seriously the female and her story. In his plays Friel gracefully reveals the struggles of the Irish female who, as a result of her oppression, has been left without voice. His plays serve to reinstate the female with voice, offering her the opportunity to speak out about her unique circumstance and to her colonizers. Writing this dissertation helped me recognize Friel's unique and powerful representation of the female. However, on 28 March 2008 I came to appreciate and respect more deeply the importance of Friel's writing when I gave birth to a daughter. Almost instantly my perspective shifted; I am suddenly responsible for raising a young woman who I hope will always find her voice and be able to speak her story. I believe now, more than ever before, that it is not just interesting and important, but vital to discuss Friel's female characterizations. And, perhaps even more importantly, it is necessary to discuss his *techniques* so that future playwrights might be inspired to follow his example and tell the story of the silenced female.

This dissertation explores Friel's response to a long history of violence and oppression in his home country of Ireland. My focus on the trauma of Ireland does not mean to imply that the island has been without its triumphs and celebrations. Throughout the long history of the country there have been many victories, and certainly today both the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland are moving forward, continually redefining themselves. In recent years there has been an economic boom in the Republic and Ireland

has found itself with one of the fastest growing economies in the European Union. Northern Ireland too has made headway: violence has decreased and the country is finding its way out of the Troubles that for thirty years defined its people. This is not to say that Friel's work is outdated or, worse, irrelevant. The traumas he addresses in his writing still greatly affect the Irish populations, and Friel's theatre works to ease the pain left over from those events.

Additionally, this dissertation does not seek to imply that the trauma of the dually colonized female is the main focus of Friel's writing. Certainly his plays (particularly those addressed in this dissertation) address the national traumas which form the backdrop of his works. Rather, my goal is to shed light on the fact that Friel also deals with the struggle of the Irish female. Friel's unique approach in writing the Irish female has yet to be thoroughly addressed, and this dissertation aims to bring this discussion into academic conversation.

The moments of rupture in Friel's plays capture the exciting and unique experience of theatre. Throughout the plays discussed Friel employs the moment of rupture not only for his characters, but for his audiences as well, as the moments occur when there is a theatrical breach in time, space, or action. In *The Freedom of the City* the moment of rupture breaks the fourth wall and time stops; in *Translations* the rupture occurs offstage and time jumps forward; and finally, in *Dancing at Lughnasa*, the rupture brings a dance to an otherwise stationary play. When the rupture occurs onstage, audience members experience a breach as they are jolted out of their passive roles as witnesses and asked to alter their viewing. Audiences are made aware of Friel's mastery

over his craft as both characters and audience are brought, through theatrical moments of rupture, into new awareness.

I do not suggest that new Irish playwrights must use Friel's moment of rupture to successfully address and speak to the trauma of the twice-colonized female. This would, in fact, be detrimental to theatre itself. If overused, the moment of rupture would become trite and ineffective. As demonstrated throughout this dissertation Friel himself continued to redefine the moment of rupture in each of his plays, altering it for each character and story. I do, however, believe that young playwrights should find their own methods of addressing the issue of the colonized female, lest her experience be forgotten and her trauma repeated. Again, this is not to suggest that every play and every playwright focus solely on the experience of the Irish female. Quite the contrary, in fact. But, currently the most-produced, most internationally well-known young Irish playwrights (Martin McDonagh and Marina Carr) are following in the footsteps of Friel's contemporary Tom Murphy, who was harshly criticized for his female characters. While I certainly believe that theatre-makers should have freedom to write, produce, and perform what they choose, I challenge playwrights, directors, and performers to produce work that moves beyond stifling caricatures of women and into realistic, passionate female figures. Without continuing to address issues of gender and sex onstage, we run the risk of moving backwards, not forward in our thinking.

This dissertation limits its focus to only three of Friel's plays, but certainly more of his work addresses issues of gender and trauma. The plays explored here offer an expansive look at Friel's representation of the female in three different decades of his writing career. In the future, I plan to expand this work by examining various productions

of these plays to see how (and *if*) directors deal with the female stories being told within the plays. While I plan to incorporate this production analysis as I move forward in this work, I feel that it would be beyond the scope of this dissertation, which, as it stands, provides a textual analysis of Friel's writing.

As I embark on the next stage of my research, I also plan to explore audience reactions to Friel's plays beyond the Irish stage. Friel's reputation as a writer is complex: in the United States he is known by a few, often standing in as the "Irish playwright" in classes and discussion. But in Ireland, he has reached a heroic status almost as high as Wilde's. He writes stories of Ireland, of its people, and its history. And yet, Friel struggled with how to write of his heritage and, at the same time, reach a global audience. In 1970 he discussed his writing, saying:

> This goes back to [the] question again: can Irish plays be intelligible outside Ireland? … I would like to write a play that would capture the peculiar spiritual and indeed material flux that this country is in at the moment. This has got to be done, for me anyway, and I think it has got to be done at a local, parochial level, and hopefully this will have meaning for other people in other countries. (Murray *Brian Friel Essays, Diaries, Interviews: 1964-1999* 35-36)

The question posed is an intriguing one: do Irish plays, and in particular, Friel's plays, work outside Ireland? Because of the success of his plays, namely *Dancing at Lughnasa*, which won a Tony for Best Play in 1990, it would appear that his works do succeed on an international stage. But, the question remains, are Friel's plays intelligible outside Ireland? This dissertation suggests that Friel's plays guide audience to and through traumas. But, if the audience members themselves have not experienced the traumas Friel is addressing in his plays, are they able to fully appreciate the theatrical experience? This

is a question I would aim to uncover as I expand this work to book form. I do not believe that Friel's plays work only on an Irish stage. In fact, I believe his plays should be performed more often than they are. Not only do they educate audiences on Irish life and trauma, they are also powerful stories about intriguing individuals. And, as proven time and again, these stories do touch international audiences. But, without experiencing the traumas that Friel wrestles with in his texts—without experiencing national crisis, or experiencing the oppression from two colonizers—can international audiences fully appreciate the power of his work?

Friel powerfully confronts his own history in writing his plays. As he dramatizes the historical traumas that have shaped his nation, he wrestles with his own "Irish-ness" while allowing audiences to witness and address this identity as well. His plays represent without re-presenting the trauma of Ireland's past while addressing the crisis of the twice-colonized female. As Friel writes the crisis of the female into his work against the backdrop of a nation in unrest, Friel gives voice to those who have been silenced. He bridges the gap left by the crevasse, bringing lost stories out of their burial ground and back to life. This powerful playwright teaches theatre makers what theatre can be, while encouraging audiences to confront their own pain and move out of it into new possibility.

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